

NORTH OVERLAND WITH FRANKLIN



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CHAPTER I

THE ARRIVAL AT YORK FACTORY

A SHEEP! a sheep! Look! a sheep!' cried Denis Latour, jumping about, and beckoning vigorously with his left hand, while with his right he pointed out across the vast blue expanse of Hudson's Bay.

Now had Denis been thrown into this state of excitement by seeing one of those useful animals which so acceptably minister to both the inside and outside of our bodies, it would not have been altogether surprising; for, as a matter of fact, they were quite unknown in the bleak region where all his young life had been spent.

But it was only his way of pronouncing the word that was responsible for such an impression, as what he really meant was not a producer of wool and mutton, but something of much more importance—to wit, a full-rigged ship, whose square sails just lifting themselves above the eastern horizon had been at once observed by his keen black eyes.

He was the first to discover the white bits of canvas, and he felt proportionately proud of himself, for the coming of the Hudson Bay Company's ship from

England was the great event of the year at York Factory, and always meant a time of merry-making, of holidaying and feasting, into which Denis entered with increasing vim as he grew older, and was permitted to share more fully in the festivities of the occasion.

In company with two others, Denis had gone down to the mouth of the Hayes River in a canoe on a fishing trip, and it was while they were taking their midday meal and rest on the shore that he, having ascended a slight eminence which commanded a wide prospect of the Bay, was the first to discover the approach of the ship.

There was no more thought of fishing that day. With utmost haste they made their way back to York Factory to tell the good news, and the governor of the Post rewarded Denis for having so good a pair of eyes with a fine sharp hunting-knife, the receipt of which made him unutterably happy.

The Fort, as York Factory was usually called, became a scene of great activity and bustle, while the officials and servants made ready to go down to welcome the ship; and presently the place was almost deserted, as they hurried off to the shore in high glee.

The Hayes River, five miles from whose mouth York Factory was built upon a peninsula separating it from the Nelson River, was not navigable for large ships, and the Prince of Wales had therefore to come to anchor at Five Fathom Hole, in the mouth of the river.

She had just rounded to, and her sails were being furled, when the people from the Fort arrived, and hastened to push off to her in the boats and canoes that were drawn up on shore in readiness.

Denis took good care that he was not left behind, and soon had the pleasure of standing on the deck, and looking about him with eyes full of curiosity and mirth.

There was an immense amount of handshaking and animated talk on board the ship, and soon the news spread that she had brought with her this time some passengers of special importance and interest.

The party consisted of eight men, and was in command of one who was destined to place his name high up on the roll of Arctic heroes, and finally to give his life to the endeavour to wrest from the pitiless icy North its jealously guarded secret of a North-west Passage.

That, however, was still far in the future, and at present he was simply Lieutenant John Franklin of the Royal Navy, who had been sent out by the British Government with instructions to proceed to the northern coast of the continent, and to explore it from the mouth of the Coppermine River eastward as far as might be practicable.

His mission was a purely scientific one. No scheme of trade or barter had a place in his mind, and, when they heard all about it, the officers of the Hudson Bay Company were filled with wonder. They could not understand any man being willing to face the inevitable peril and hardship of such an undertaking for the sake of settling a mere geographical problem.

Nevertheless they could not fail to be impressed by the enthusiasm and resolution wherewith Lieut. Franklin and his associates were inspired. If ever men were in earnest, they were ; and, seeing what sensible, well-spoken persons they seemed to be, they came to

think that the object of their enterprise must be of some practical consequence after all.

Having been for nearly four months tossing upon the billows of the Atlantic in the stout, slow-sailing ship which had brought them over, the members of the expedition were only too glad to settle down for a good rest at the Fort, while making preparations for the land portion of their arduous journey.

Although it was the headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company in Canada, York Factory did not present a very imposing appearance.

A stout stockade, some twenty feet in height, enclosed a large square, in which were placed the various buildings of the establishment, the governor's house, the officers' quarters, the men's barracks, and the storehouses and magazines.

They were all low, heavily built structures, with tiny windows, and utterly devoid of style or ornament, and looked their best in mid-winter, when, being half buried in snow, they had, at least, a cosy, comfortable appearance, with the mercury almost at the bottom of the thermometer.

Denis Latour, who had never seen anything better, but had lived in very much worse habitations, thought them very fine, and the height of his ambition was to win for himself a room in the officers' quarters, which he hoped to do by faithfully serving the Company.

All about the Fort the country was flat and swampy, and had been covered with larch, spruce, birch, and willow; but the demand for winter fuel had exhausted the groves in the neighbourhood of the Post, leaving only the jagged stumps to render still more ugly the depressing landscape.

Amid such surroundings Denis Latour had grown

up from babyhood well into his teens ; and, so far as the future could be forecast, the probabilities seemed that in similar fashion he would spend the rest of his life. But he was quite content with his prospect.

His father a French Canadian *voyageur*, and his mother the erstwhile belle of a Cree camp, he had no chance to acquire big notions of things ; and to do so well in the Company's employ as to be able to pay an occasional visit to the Red River Settlement, and perhaps to see the great city of Montreal at least once, was the limit of his boyish hopes.

He was a decidedly good-looking lad. His countenance and complexion he had taken from his father, his eyes, and hair, and general figure from his mother. Although not large for his years, he had a well-knit frame, and was capable of great endurance.

Like all of his class, he was deft of hand and sharp of eye. He could use either gun or pistol with unerring accuracy, and he could handle hatchet or knife with a skill that would have filled the ordinary school-boy with envy. But what distinguished him from the other boys at the Post, and made him a special favourite, was his genuine musical talent.

This was of course purely natural—he had never had a lesson, in the true sense of the term, yet he could play the piccolo in a way that would have won plaudits even from an educated audience.

The little flute was a present from one of the officers who had been struck by Denis' wonderful aptitude at picking up tunes, and singing or whistling them with an amount of expression nothing short of remarkable.

It was a wonderful boon to the young half-breed.

The music that seemed to bubble up from his

breast, and which had hitherto found but imperfect expression through the medium of his unaided lips, now poured forth from the piccolo, and won for him the hearty admiration and gratitude of tawny *voyageur* and dusky Indian alike.

Indeed, the power of bewitching the ears of other people saved him many a time from punishment that he richly deserved, for he was an incorrigible mischief, and was always getting into some sort of scrape ; but, thanks to the popularity won by his piccolo, and his own comical ways, he generally managed to get out again with a whole skin.

Now it seemed a curious thing that such a boy should conceive an instant and absolute attachment for a man so utterly different from himself as Lieut. Franklin, and yet this was precisely what occurred.

One might almost call it a case of love at first sight, and the way Denis followed the lieutenant about soon began to attract attention.

At first the latter did not notice it, for there were always some hangers-on in the place where so many seemed to have little or nothing to do ; but after an adventure he had, in which Denis was able to render him a very timely service, his interest in the lad was awakened.

A kind of sport that the locality afforded was the chase of the beluga, or white whale, which frequented the mouth of the Hayes River, and Mr. Williams, the governor of the Post, at Lieut. Franklin's request, made arrangements for him to see how the big fish was taken.

Accordingly, one fine morning a couple of boats went down the river, containing the lieutenant and his fellow officers, outfitted for whale-hunting, Lieut.

Franklin and Dr. Richardson being in one boat, and the two midshipmen, Hood and Back, in the other, each boat having two sturdy oarsmen to do the hard work.

Denis was not invited to join the party, but he went all the same. He possessed a very good little canoe, which he could manage with astonishing dexterity, and with another boy of the same age he paddled down to see the fun, keeping well in the wake of the boats.

On arriving at the flats, they found the white whales were there awaiting them, and so the chase began with great vigour.

The method employed was to harpoon the whale, and then, when it was fast, send bullets into it until it was motionless in death.

Both boats were soon fast to good-sized fish, and as their victims strove to get away they pulled them swiftly through the water.

Denis knew better than to attempt to do anything from his frail craft, save to watch the others, always keeping as close to Lieut. Franklin's boat as he could manage.

The excitement increased as the whales fought furiously, dragging the boats hither and thither, and the lieutenant got greatly worked up.

It was proving even livelier sport than he had anticipated, and being anxious to have a full share in the final issue, he stood up in the bow of the boat, gun in hand, eagerly watching for a chance to send a bullet into the beluga's heart. But the great fish, as if divining his purpose, darted this way and that with unrelaxing velocity, and presently, with a complete change of course, doubled back towards the boat, thus suddenly

slackening the line, which had been as taut as a bowstring.

How it happened was not very clear, but in some way the line thus got a turn around Lieut. Franklin's feet, and when, darting off again in another direction, the whale drew it taut, the lieutenant was, to the consternation of the others, dragged off his feet, and into the water, as though he had been a mere bit of wood.

It was all so sudden and startling, that the other occupants of the boat could do nothing to prevent it.

Not only so, but in their momentary confusion they jumped about so as to upset the rather clumsy craft, and thus were rendered powerless to be of any service whatever.

In this complicated state of affairs the position of the lieutenant became one of great peril.

Although a powerful swimmer, he was rendered powerless by the entangling line, which drew him under the water with irresistible force. Indeed, his only chance of escape from death by drowning was that the line should be cut without delay. But who was to do this? His own companions in the boat were struggling in the water, and the other boat was too far off to reach the spot in time.

Most fortunate therefore was it that Denis Latour had taken it upon himself to be present, for by a happy chance his canoe was not many yards distant from the scene of the upset. His keen eye took in the whole situation, and his quick wit showed him just what was to be done.

With quick, powerful strokes he drove the canoe close up to the imperilled officer, and then, unsheathing his long knife, sprang out into the water beside

him. But, between the furious efforts of the harpooned whale to get away and the strenuous struggles of Lieut. Franklin to free himself from the line, there was such confusion that for a moment or two Denis dared not use his knife.

Then he saw his opportunity. The line came to the surface for one instant as the whale lifted itself out of the water, and with a swift stroke of his keen blade Denis severed it a few feet in front of Lieut. Franklin.

He was not a second too soon. The poor man was fast being smothered into unconsciousness, and certainly would have been drowned ere any of the others could have rendered him aid. But with the line cut he was at once able to free himself, and to grasp the gunwale of the canoe, where he hung for a minute or two, breathless and exhausted.

Denis, with an expertness that the English officer could never hope to imitate, clambered back into the cranky craft, and said to Lieut. Franklin encouragingly, 'You keep hold tight. Other boat come soon. *Voilà* she be here in a minute.'

The other boat was coming up as fast as her rowers could get her through the water, and presently reached the spot, whereupon Lieut. Franklin and his immersed companions were lifted in out of the icy water.

Denis of course was loudly praised for his timely and efficient service.

'You undoubtedly saved my life, my boy,' said the lieutenant, warmly pressing his hand, 'and I don't know how I can adequately reward you, but I shall try to show you how deep is my gratitude.'

Denis was too abashed to say anything in reply, yet there was already growing in his heart a desire

that it would be in Lieut. Franklin's power to gratify, and which he intended to make known at the proper time.

Instead of returning to the Fort at once, the whole party—the upset boat having been righted and baled out—hastened to the ship, which lay at anchor about a mile away, and there dry clothes were obtained for those who had been in the water.

Denis was very glad to go on board the *Prince of Wales*. The big ship interested him greatly, and he had visited her several times before, on the occasion of her annual advent. But then he had been admitted on sufferance, and understood that it was expected him to make himself as small as possible, and not to get into anybody's way, whereas now he was something of a hero, for Lieut. Franklin made known to all how cleverly he had rescued him from a strange death.

The ship's crew did not stint their praise, for Lieut. Franklin had greatly endeared himself to them on the voyage, and Denis, to his vast delight, found himself the recipient of a score of presents, all of which he highly appreciated. Thus the captain of the ship gave him a guinea piece to serve as a gold medal, the first officer a big silk handkerchief of a brilliant hue, the second officer a new leather belt with a sheath-knife attached, and then the sailors added various little trifles.

But Lieut. Franklin's gift was the one that pleased him most of all, being a fine new gun of the latest make, together with a generous supply of powder and bullets.

Denis clasped the gun to his heart as if it had been something alive.

'Oh! I am happy!' he exclaimed ecstatically.

‘This is a beautiful gun, and I will be able to shoot everything with it.’

‘Take care then that you do not shoot some of us, Denis,’ said Lieut. Franklin in good-humoured warning.

‘Oh no!’ replied Denis, with a touch of indignation in his tone, for he was an expert shot, having been accustomed to the use of firearms for years past.

From that time Denis’s devotion to the lieutenant was more marked than ever, so that it became a kind of joke at the Fort, and a bright young official nicknamed Denis ‘Shadow.’

In the meantime preparations had been actively going on for the start of the exploring expedition whose goal was the far-away Arctic coast.

Lieut. Franklin had authority to call upon the Company’s officers for all the assistance they could render, and the latter co-operated heartily with him.

The governor had a big York boat made ready, which it was expected would carry the party and their stores as far as navigation by so large and heavy a craft was possible, and then of course they would take to the canoes.

September had come before all was in readiness, and then came the question as to the composition of the expedition. There were eight persons in Lieut. Franklin’s party, and the boat should not have to carry more than twelve. It was therefore necessary to be very careful in the selection of the remaining four.

A competent steersman was, of course, essential, and for this important office a French Canadian, who knew the route thoroughly, was supplied by Governor Williams.

With some difficulty, for the men knew there would be lots of hard work, and preferred to stay where they

were, two other *voyageurs* were engaged to go as far as the boat went, and thus there was only one vacancy.

For this Denis earnestly applied. His heart was set on accompanying the expedition, and he was not going to be disappointed for lack of enterprise in asking.

At first Lieut. Franklin was inclined to think the request somewhat of a joke.

‘Why, Denis, my boy,’ he said in a kindly tone of protest, ‘you would never be able to stand all the fatigues of such a journey as we have before us. You would soon get completely used up, and we’d have to leave you at one of the forts.’ But Denis answered this objection by assuring the lieutenant that he had been as far as Fort Chipewan, on Lake Athabasca, right in the heart of the great wilderness, and that he could endure fatigue as well as any of the men.

Being assured that this was true, and taking a closer look at the boy’s active, well-knit figure and bright, resolute face, Lieut. Franklin was disposed to admit that his first objection was fairly met.

But then came another no less to the point. ‘If I should take you, Denis, and you are equal to the hardships of the route, what use would you be to us? You cannot carry a full load at the portage, nor help in pulling the boat through the rapids as a man could.’

Not a whit daunted by the truth of this argument, Denis responded:

‘But I can hunt for you, and catch fish, and I will help all I can at the portage, and when the boat is in the rapids,’ and here he paused for a moment, so as to make his final plea as effective as possible—‘I can make music for you,’ saying which he pulled out his piccolo, and putting it to his lips, poured forth a

cheery lilt that set the feet of the *voyageurs* a-tapping as they stood by listening eagerly to the conversation.

It was really the production of the piccolo that settled the matter. Lieut. Franklin was a keen observer of human nature. He saw how the faces of the men brightened and their eyes lit up at the lively music, and the thought came to him that, thanks to this accomplishment, Denis would prove a valuable addition to the party. His little flute would serve to enliven them when they were over-wearied with the exertion of fighting their way against opposing rapids, and of toiling over tiresome portages ; and moreover, if the lad's skill with the gun was what he claimed, he certainly would be most useful in providing game wherewith to vary the monotony of pemmican.

So after a brief consultation with his companions the lieutenant turned to Denis and said :

‘Very well, then, Denis, you may come with us as my personal attendant ; and remember, my boy, you must do just as you are told, for if I find that you are disobedient or neglectful of my commands, I shall certainly send you back by the first party I meet.’

CHAPTER II

WORKING UP RIVER

AMID the cheers of the residents of York Factory, and with the good wishes of all for a successful journey and a safe return, the little expedition set forth in the first part of the month of September.

There was nothing imposing about it. One big clumsy York boat held the whole of it—that is to say, it held all the people; but unfortunately it had not storage room for all their stores, and consequently much had to be left behind. Some of the bacon, and a good deal of the flour, rice, tobacco, and ammunition, had thus to be parted with, and the need of them was keenly felt later on, as will be seen.

When the boat, with sail hoisted to catch the favouring wind, moved off up the river a salute of eight guns was given by the Fort and a hearty round of cheers, which Lieut. Franklin and his companions returned to the best of their ability. Denis was in great spirits. Seated in the bow of the boat he laughed, and sang, and played on his flute with a gusto that made the men smile, and confirmed Lieut. Franklin in the wisdom of his allowing him to come.

‘He’ll be more than worth his salt to us,’ he said to himself. ‘He seems as light of heart as a bird, and besides making himself useful, as he can do with his

gun, he'll help to keep our spirits up with his amusing ways and his pretty music.'

Not only had Denis succeeded in joining himself to the expedition, but he had got leave for his dog to come also. This dog was as much out of the ordinary in his own way as his young master was in his.

A pure specimen of the Huskie, or Eskimo breed, he had been trained to the sledge, and made a splendid leader on a team of four; but that was not his only accomplishment. With wonderful patience Denis had taught him a lot of tricks, and some useful things besides; and being a handsome black and white creature, with a splendid coat of hair and big bright eyes, he was much coveted by those who saw him, so that Denis had had many offers for him.

But Koyee, as he had cleverly named him, being the Indian for 'Shadow,' and very appropriate too, seeing how closely the dog followed him, was too dear to be parted with, and now he stood on top of the pile of stores in the centre of the boat barking lustily, by way of returning the salute just given from the Fort.

For some miles it was plain sailing, both tide and wind serving to help the boat along; but by the time the limit of the tide's influence had been reached the wind fell so that the boat could not make headway against the current, and it became necessary to resort to tracking.

This was always a laborious operation, and sometimes extremely so. Having hold of a long line attached to the bow of the boat, the men were obliged to make their way over the steep declivity of a high bank rendered soft and slippery by frequent rains, their progress being often impeded by fallen trees which hung on the face of the bank in all directions.

Notwithstanding their difficulties, however, they advanced at the rate of two miles an hour, one-half the crew relieving the other at frequent intervals, and by sunset some twelve miles had been thus accomplished, which might be considered a very fair day's work.

A good camping-place having been selected, the tents were pitched and a big fire speedily kindled, and after a hearty supper the whole party rolled up in buffalo robes and blankets for a night of sound repose, leaving Koyee in charge as sentinel.

So profound were the slumbers of the men (for all had from time to time helped in either pushing or hauling the heavy boat up-stream), that their motionless figures seemed more like those of the dead than of living men.

It was no wonder therefore that the soft, silent advance of two dusky forms was unperceived, and that they had already reached the boat, and had each seized upon a goodly package from the pile of stores, ere their nefarious design was discovered.

It was Koyee that gave the alarm. Although curled up on the ground beside Denis in what was apparently a sound slumber, his keen scent had told him of the proximity of the robbers, and springing to his feet he dashed at them, barking loudly. His master was the first to awake, and seizing his gun, which he had wrapped up in his blanket beside him, he rushed after the dog, calling out :

'Who goes there? Oh! it is thieves! Stop you now, or I'll shoot you,' and levelling his gun at the retreating figures he prepared to fire.

If they had not halted, he certainly would have pulled the trigger ; but with Koyee snapping at their heels, and the deadly firearm menacing them, they

wisely decided to drop their plunder and sue for mercy.

By this time the whole of the camp was aroused, and the midnight marauders were promptly surrounded and seized. They proved to be a couple of Swampy Crees, of which tribe there was a small encampment in the neighbourhood of the Fort. They had evidently followed the boat along the bank of the river, sagely calculating that the first day's hard work at tracking up-stream would make everybody so tired that they would sleep like logs, and thus render it an easy job to steal some of the stores.

Had it not been for Koyee their little game would have been entirely successful, and Lieut. Franklin was very warm in his praise of the dog's sagacity.

'You and Koyee will certainly pay your way handsomely, at this rate,' he said to Denis. 'We can ill afford to lose any of our stores, for we have too little as it is.'

The question now was what to do with the Indians thus caught red-handed, so to speak. They richly deserved punishment, but how was it to be administered? The proper thing, of course, would have been to send them back to the Fort, and allow Governor Williams to impose the penalty. But this would have entailed a whole day's delay, if not more, and time was precious, as the expedition must move forward vigorously, in order to get into good winter quarters before further progress would be impracticable.

Lieut. Franklin therefore, after consultation with his associates, decided to let the rascals go after giving them a sharp lecture.

They were such poor squalid creatures, and seemed so utterly woebegone and miserable, that no sooner

had the kind-hearted officer finished lecturing them than his feelings overcame his sense of justice, and he directed that each of them should be given a small quantity of flour and a pinch of tobacco, although there was really not a morsel of either commodity to spare.

Denis laughed when he saw this.

'The chief' (as he called Lieut. Franklin) 'has too soft a heart,' he said. 'Those bad Indians not deserve to get anything but big licking.'

Denis understood very little about the working of the Golden Rule. To get as much as possible for oneself, without caring particularly how one's neighbours might fare, was his conception of life; and if he had not wellnigh worshipped the 'chief,' the latter would have been in some danger of incurring his contempt by so lenient a treatment of the thieving Crees.

The start was made at daybreak next morning, and, the wind being favourable, hopes were entertained of relying upon it for progression. But it soon proved too light to enable the deeply-laden boat to stem the stream, and the fatiguing business of tracking had to be resumed.

This was rendered more difficult by the nature of the river banks. In some places they consisted of cliffs so steep that the toiling men could scarcely find a footing, while farther on they would be low and marshy, and the trouble was not so much to find a foothold, as to loose it again, the men sank so deep in the mire.

In order to lighten the boat, and at the same time get a good idea of the course of the river and the character of the surrounding country, Lieut. Franklin

and the other officers, whenever possible, walked alongshore. Denis and Koyee always accompanied them, and this was pure happiness for both, as they vastly preferred it to being cooped up in the boat.

Denis knew the features of the route thoroughly, and pointed them out to the Englishmen, telling their story, if they had one, in his own bright, graphic way. Thus at one spot there had been a dreadful tragedy some years before, which Denis described in this fashion :

‘ You see that rock there, all tumbled down,’ pointing to a bit of beach half covered with the débris of a fallen cliff that had evidently stood straight up from it. ‘ Well, that kill one—two—three—many people.’

‘ Why, how was that, Denis?’ asked Dr. Richardson in some surprise, for in that lonely barren land one would not expect such a calamity to happen.

‘ It happened this way, you see,’ answered Denis. ‘ They come there in canoes—two families—father, mother, little children, and they put up tents very near the big rock, see,’ and he indicated a spot right beneath the pile of shattered cliff. ‘ Then they all go to sleep. Presently the rock began to crack, but they sleep so sound they not hear it, and then all sudden down it fall on top of them, and they all be killed. But,’ he added, noting the look of horror and pity on the countenances of the listeners, ‘ they only poor Indian. They no good anyway.’

Considering that he had Indian blood in his veins, Denis’s frank contempt for his dusky brethren was quite amusing. If he had been a thoroughbred Frenchman from the old land instead of merely a local half-breed, he could not have held himself more above them. They were all ‘ poor trash ’ in his eyes.

On further inquiry Lieut. Franklin learned that Denis had not exaggerated the disaster which had occurred at this place.

Two large families of the Swampy Crees, attracted by the smooth, level character of the small beach lying between the cliff and the river, chose it as the site of their encampment.

They went to sleep, little conceiving that the cliff side had become detached from the bank behind it by the action of water, and was just ready to fall.

That very night, while all were still in sleep, it fell upon them, burying the whole party in destruction and death.

‘How strange it seems!’ remarked Dr. Richardson thoughtfully. ‘With all the wild wilderness to choose from for their camping-ground, and yet they pitched upon the only spot where this could possibly have happened!’

‘But what would you have?’ said Denis. ‘They were only Indians—not good white people.’

The others could not help smiling. He seemed so anxious to depreciate the calamity.

‘And are Indians nothing?’ asked Lieut. Franklin. ‘Are they not men too? Why, you are part Indian yourself, are you not?’

Denis flushed so hotly that the tawny tint of his skin was for the moment submerged by the flood of crimson.

It was too straight a home-thrust to be parried, and to hide his confusion he chirruped to Koyee, and bounded off, as if he had sighted a hare and would run it down.

‘That’s a curious lad, doctor,’ said the lieutenant, following him as he raced away. ‘I can’t quite make

him out, but I'm convinced there's good stuff in him ; don't you think so ?'

'I do decidedly,' responded Dr. Richardson. 'He's the most interesting specimen of the native that I've seen so far, and I'm very glad he's coming along with us—he'll be useful to us in more ways than one.'

Already Dr. Richardson, who had come out not only in his professional capacity, but as botanist and naturalist, had found Denis's quick eyes of service to him, and he anticipated getting much assistance from him with regard to the animal and vegetable life of the land through which they would pass.

The boat made over sixteen miles that day, and hardly had the tents been pitched when a heavy down-pour of rain began, which continued through the night, making all hands very uncomfortable, and Denis's flute was called into requisition in the morning, to enliven the spirits of the men ere they went to work.

Two days' more hard tracking brought them to the mouth of the Steel River, into which they turned, and had an easier time of it for a while, the river being broad and placid.

The scenery grew in beauty as the boat advanced inland. The Steel River wound through a narrow but well-wooded valley, which at every turn disclosed an agreeable variety of prospect, rendered more picturesque by the effect of the season upon the foliage, which was just ready to fall from the branches.

The light yellow of the fading poplar formed a fine contrast to the dark evergreen of the spruce, whilst the willows of an intermediate hue served to shade the two colours into each other. Here and there the bright purple tints of the dogwood blending with the brown of the dwarf birch, and the gay yellow of

the shrubby cinquefoil, enlivened the scene, so that the Englishmen, to whom it was all so novel, frequently exclaimed in admiration at the beauty about them.

But it was a strange, silent land. Hardly any animal life was to be observed, and there was absolutely no trace of human existence.

So perfect was the stillness at midday that Denis was able to have a good laugh at the expense of the officers. They had walked along the bank ahead of the boat, Dr. Richardson botanizing, Mr. Hood sketching, and Mr. Back assisting Lieut. Franklin in making a running survey of the river course, until they had all become tired, and threw themselves down to rest in the shade of a big spruce.

The men were lost in the enjoyment of rest and of their pipes, which were all smoking like furnaces, when suddenly the warm silence was broken by a strange, shrill, jeering cry that rang out close at hand.

Simultaneously the three officers sprang to their feet and looked eagerly about them.

The cry was so penetrating, and had such a curious challenging tone, that they all thought it must have come from some large and possibly dangerous creature.

But, instead of joining in their concern, Denis lay back and laughed till he showed every shining white tooth in his mouth, and Koyee, who, if the disturber of the peace had been a beast of prey, would assuredly have been alert with bristling hair and menacing growl, only looked up into his master's face, as though to say: 'What's the joke? What are you making such a noise about?'

Lieut. Franklin, realizing at once that they had been imposed upon by some harmless creature, grew red with mortification, and being incensed at Denis's

laughing instead of explaining what it was, said to him somewhat angrily:

‘Stop your foolishness, and tell us what made that noise.’

Denis was sobered at once, for he saw that the chief was out of humour.

‘Please, sir,’ he said in an apologetic tone, as if he were in some way responsible for the false alarm, ‘it’s only a whisky-johneesh.’

‘Whisky-johneesh!’ exclaimed Lieut. Franklin. ‘What under the sun is that? A beast or bird or what?’

‘If you will come with me I will show you,’ replied Denis.

They accordingly followed him to the other side of the spruce, and there, sitting solemnly upon a blasted birch-tree, was the source of the strange cries, a large ashen-hued crow.

‘Shoot him, Denis,’ commanded the lieutenant. ‘He shan’t play any such trick upon us again.’

Denis instantly raised his gun, but the crow was too quick for him. With a parting shriek of derision it darted off, and putting a thick spruce between itself and the gun, made good its escape.

The next day’s advance brought the expedition to the head of the Steel River, and they turned into the Fox River, which was even more rapid, and harder to ascend.

Here they were overtaken by a Mr. Macdonald, one of the Company’s officers, on his way to Red River. He had only a light canoe and two Indians.

Both parties being in need of fresh meat, it was decided to halt for a day’s shooting, and to rest the men who had been tracking the boat.

This arrangement was much to Denis's mind. Provided as he now was with gun and hunting-knife, he felt equal to anything, and was burning to prove his prowess.

Mr. Macdonald's Indians had no weapon save their tomahawks, yet they started out as confidently as if they carried good guns and plenty of ammunition.

'What can they get with those little hatchets?' asked Dr. Richardson, somewhat disdainfully; for, on the face of it, their chances of game seemed decidedly small.

'Wait until you see,' responded Mr. Macdonald. 'They can do better with their tomahawks than some of us can with our guns.'

Lieut. Franklin, Dr. Richardson, the two midshipmen, and Denis, with, of course, Koyee, went off together in one direction, while the Indians, with their little hatchets, took another.

'We'll see who'll have the best luck,' said the lieutenant as they parted. 'I'm depending on Denis and Koyee to get me a shot at a deer.'

They were soon out of sight of each other, and Denis, who had trained his dog to keep close, and not range all over the country, said confidently, as he pointed with pride at the clever creature:

'Koyee soon find deer; he know how.'

For a mile or more they tramped over ridges and down into ravines, but no deer were sighted, and the lieutenant was beginning to grow impatient, when Koyee, who had reached the top of a ridge in advance of them, stood stock still, save for the energetic wagging of his tail.

'He's seen them!' whispered Denis eagerly; 'go very soft, or they be frightened.'

Scarce venturing to breathe, the party crept silently up the slope, and keeping flat upon the ground, peeped carefully over into the hollow beyond.

Sure enough there was a small herd of deer, which had taken refuge from the hot autumn sun in the shade of a bunch of maple-trees.

‘You see them?’ whispered Denis, trembling in his anxiety and ardour, but refraining from firing until Lieut. Franklin had had the first shot.

There was no difficulty in seeing the animals, but, as it happened, none of them stood in such a position as to afford a favourable shot, and the officers hesitated.

‘Why you not fire?’ demanded Denis impatiently, for he was, of course, a pot-hunter pure and simple, and knew nothing of the niceties of sport.

At that moment Koyee, no longer able to contain himself, dashed down the hill barking fiercely, and the deer, after one instant of paralysis from fright, bounded away at the top of their speed. In so doing they presented their full side to the hunters, and a quick succession of reports rang out. All four of the party fired, no one knowing at which animal the other had aimed.

Yet, strange to say, although two of the deer stumbled for a moment, none fell, and the whole herd vanished down the ravine.

Denis, as he sprang to his feet, was the very incarnation of disappointment and wrath. He felt disgraced by the failure of his own shot, and at the same time provoked with the officers for having delayed to fire until the deer had been disturbed.

‘It was your fault!’ he fairly screamed, quite for-

getting good manners in his excitement. 'You did wait too long.'

'Be quiet, boy!' said Lieut. Franklin sternly, for he was rather out of humour himself. 'We've missed our first chance; hurry up now, and let us try for another.'

Brought to his senses by the sharp words, Denis hastened to reload his gun, and then, his countenance changing with the rapidity characteristic of his race, said brightly:

'They not go far. Come—we find them encore;' and calling Koyee back to him he set off at a run in the direction whither the deer had fled.

CHAPTER III

IN PERILS OF WATERS

PRESSING on at full speed, with Koyee as guide, the little hunting-party had gone quite half a mile ere they were halted by a signal from Denis, who was a score of yards in advance.

The deer had been again sighted, for not being closely pursued they had stopped as soon as their first alarm was over, and were now grazing quietly in a grassy hollow.

‘Not miss this time,’ said Denis, with a sanguine smile. ‘Fire quick, eh?’

The men nodded assent, and then the four crept carefully upon their quarry.

There were two fine bucks in the herd, and Lieut. Franklin, so as to make a sure thing of it, whispered to Dr. Richardson, ‘You and I take that one, and you two,’ turning to the midshipmen, ‘take the other. Do you, Denis,’ he added, ‘wait for a moment, in case another shot be needed to finish our work.’

Denis would have much preferred firing first, but he obeyed orders, although he made a grimace of protest. Taking careful aim, the four men pulled triggers at the same instant, and simultaneously with the report of their guns the two bucks leaped into the air and pitched forward upon their heads. But only

the one at which Lieut. Franklin and Dr. Richardson had fired remained down ; the other almost instantly recovered himself, and was darting away when Denis's gun cracked, and the fleeing animal, this time stricken to the heart, went down with such force as wellnigh to turn a somersault.

'Bravo, Denis !' cried the lieutenant. 'That was a beautiful shot ! But for it we should have lost him.'

On examining the deer it was found that while both the senior men had placed their bullets in a vital spot, and therefore shared equally in the honour of their quarry, the midshipmen had not done so well, for one of them must have missed altogether, while the other had hit the buck at the base of the antlers, thus bringing him to his knees for a moment, but doing him no more harm.

'This is your deer, Denis,' said Lieut. Franklin. 'It was your bullet that killed him'—to which decision the midshipmen made no demur.

Having marked the place where the deer were, the hunters made haste back to camp, in order that some of the men might be sent to bring in the meat.

They felt very well pleased with themselves, and it was in quite a jaunty tone that Lieut. Franklin, as soon as he saw Mr. Macdonald, called out :

'Well, we've done our day's work. Got two fine bucks. How did your Indians succeed with their absurd little hatchets ?'

'Not so badly,' responded the Hudson Bay officer. 'Look there !' and he pointed to two big bundles lying on the ground.

These represented the red men's results of the chase, and consisted of the skins of two large deer, in which were rolled up the haunches, and the tit-bits

dear to the Indian palate. Nor did the two deer comprise the whole of their takings. Each had also secured a brace of partridges, and one had brought down a hawk, and the other a curlew, the sole weapon in every case being the tomahawk upon which the Englishmen had looked with contempt.

‘It’s simply wonderful!’ exclaimed Lieut. Franklin, ‘and quite beats my comprehension. I shall never understand it until I see how they do it.’

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to remain a long time in ignorance, then,’ returned Mr. Macdonald smiling. ‘They say they can’t do anything if there are any white men around. I suppose we’re so clumsy that we spoil the whole business. They manage it somehow by creeping noiselessly on the game, and then throwing the hatchet so as to give a mortal wound.’

‘Can you do it, Denis?’ asked the lieutenant, turning to the boy, who was standing near with bored look, as if there was nothing so wonderful about it all.

‘No, sir,’ answered Denis colouring slightly; for it was not pleasant to have to admit that the despised Indian could do anything that he could not.

‘Then they can teach you something after all, can’t they?’ returned Lieut. Franklin in a bantering tone. ‘You’d better get them to give you some lessons.’

Denis shook his head very decidedly. With his new gun he felt able to surpass any number of Indians with tomahawks, and he would not demean himself by taking lessons from them.

The journey up-river was resumed next morning, and during the course of the day three of the Company’s boats *en route* to Red River came along, so that there was plenty of company.

This was particularly welcome, because Hill River at this point presented many difficulties, the water being low and the rapids almost continuous. Indeed, in many places all those in the boats had to jump into the water and lift the clumsy craft over the boulders, which impeded navigation, and the result of a very hard day's work was less than seven miles' advance. But that night at camp was a merry one.

With plenty of game to feast upon, and no lack of tobacco for their pipes, the men were in high good humour, and, despite the severe toils of the day, sang and danced and told stories for a couple of hours.

Denis's flute was much in evidence, and he had to go through his entire *répertoire* ere he was allowed to curl up in his blanket. But he quite enjoyed it. He loved the applause of his companions, and was quite willing to work for it.

At five o'clock the following morning all four boats set off again; but Lieut. Franklin, being really overloaded, and not having so competent a set of boatmen, could not keep up with the others, and presently fell behind.

The lieutenant, indeed, earnestly besought those in charge of the other boats, which were not heavily laden, to help him by relieving him of a part of his cargo; but this they churlishly refused to do, and pushed on, leaving him far in their rear.

He was very much incensed at this, because he carried a circular letter from Governor Williams, strictly enjoining all the Company's servants to afford him every assistance in their power.

But it seemed to have no effect upon them, and they went on their way without heeding his requests or his reproaches. This provoking conduct on the

part of these experienced *voyageurs*, who might have been so helpful, was made the harder to endure by the difficulties of navigation, and the fact of the steersman of the boat not being thoroughly familiar with the route.

Again and again he took the wrong channel, and, as a result of this, the boat was put in imminent danger of being broken on the rocks.

Once the situation was very critical. At a point where a rocky island divided the river, the steersman had taken the right-hand turning when he should have taken the left, and, as a consequence, they got into a very bad place, where the tow-line, not being equal to the strain, snapped just at the critical moment, and the heavy boat, breaking away from all control, went swirling down the swift current amid the shouts and cries of the men, who trembled for its safety.

Lieut. Franklin, followed by the other officers, seeing that the boatmen were overpowered by the fury of the rapids, flung themselves recklessly into the water to go to their assistance; and then ensued an heroic struggle between the two forces, the river fighting for the boat with the determination of a living creature.

Denis, not to be outdone, leaped into the water; also Koyee, of course, at his heels; and the scene became one of intense excitement.

Had it been a canoe they were looking after, the task would have been easy enough, in spite of the strength of the current; but instead of that light, graceful craft, it was a strong wooden boat, heavily laden, and offering a fine mark for the down-rushing stream.

Happily, before it could crash upon the jagged rocks, that would have damaged it beyond repair, the officers and boatmen got control of it, and, with great difficulty maintaining their footing among the slippery stones, were keeping its bow on to the rapid.

'Here, take this, Denis, and fasten it to that rock,' Lieut. Franklin called out, throwing him the end of the tow-line, which had been hastily spliced.

Denis caught the line, and, wading through the deeper water, reached a rock that afforded a good hold for it.

'All right!' he cried; 'me tie it here.'

He had thrown the line around the rock, and was just about to make a knot, when the weight of the rapids for a moment overcame those who were holding the boat, and it made a sudden dart down stream.

Of course this put an instant strain upon the line that Denis did not expect, and ere he knew what had happened he was dragged off his feet and flung into the whirling stream, Koyee springing after him, with a bark that seemed to say:

'I'm coming, too. I'll help you all I can.'

There was not much danger of Denis drowning, for he was an expert swimmer, but there was of his being banged against the rocks and badly bruised ere he could regain his footing; and the others watched him with such concern that they almost forgot the boat for the moment.

Down he went like a bit of wood, Koyee vainly endeavouring to get to his side, and it seemed as if he must suffer some injury from the pitiless rocks, when he came broadside against a boulder that

checked his course long enough to enable him to get control of himself.

Rising to his feet by the aid of the boulder, he stood there a moment, looking about in a dazed sort of way.

Then Lieut. Franklin called out to him :

‘Are you hurt, Denis? Shall I come to you?’ for by this time the boat was again secured, and he was free to leave it. Denis, gathering himself together, smiled back at the lieutenant as gaily as if such an experience was an everyday occurrence.

‘It’s no matter, thank you ; I’m not hurt ; I’ll come to you.’ And forthwith he made his way back to the boat.

‘Well done, Denis!’ was the chorus that greeted him. ‘You were not born to be drowned, that’s sure.’

Denis laughed. He did not quite understand the joke, but he thought it was some sort of a compliment, and that satisfied him.

By dint of great care and unremitting exertion, the boat was at length extracted from its perilous position, and got into deep water again ; but so much time was lost through the delays, that only six miles’ advance was accomplished by sunset.

For several days following, the boatmen had such hard work that all hands gave them assistance ; and yet progress was very slow, from ten to twelve miles being the most that could be done in a day.

One of the worst places was Rock Portage, where the river, pent in by a range of small islands, formed several cascades, none of which could be ascended.

It was therefore necessary to take out all the cargo, portage it across one of the islands, and then, by dint

of tremendous toil, drag the heavy boat across the island and launch it again on the upper side. ,

‘This is fearful work, doctor, isn’t it?’ said Lieut. Franklin to Dr. Richardson, as he sat on a rock resting and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. ‘I wonder how long it’s going to last. We seem to be getting ahead so slowly, and yet there’s no way of quickening our speed.’

‘We certainly are not making rapid progress, yet see how hard the men are working,’ responded Dr. Richardson. ‘Those Orkney boatmen are a constant wonder to me.’

He might well say this about the Orkneymen. They quite eclipsed the local boatmen in the energy and skill with which they did their work. Owing to the frequency with which they must jump into the water to lift the boat over the rocks, they were compelled to spend the whole day in their wet clothes, and this at a time of year when the temperature was down at freezing-point. Moreover, at the portages they carried the biggest loads across, and yet they never grumbled or hung back. Indeed, if the expedition had only included twice as many of them as it did, it would have been far better in every way.

The farther they advanced the greater seemed the difficulties. One day only a mile and a half were gained. Yet they presently caught up with the other boats, which could go no faster than themselves.

Indeed, it was most fortunate that they did, or otherwise Groundwater Creek might have proved the end of their journey. , In this place they had to urge the boat forward against a strong, swift current by means of poles, and at the upper end of the creek, the bowman giving the boat too great a sheer in

endeavouring to avoid a rock, the current caught it in the broadside, and, despite the frantic efforts of the men, hurried it down the rapid.

The emergency was a thrilling one. Being all on board the boat, they could do nothing to check its descent, save use their poles as best they might, and this was of small avail.

Down they darted, twisting and turning helplessly, until at last, with a shock that tumbled the bowman into the water and knocked the rest of them off their feet, they struck against a rock which would let them go no farther.

By this time the crews of the other boats had hurried to their assistance, and, after several attempts, a rope having been thrown to them, the boat, now wellnigh swamped, was dragged stern foremost up the stream, and thus rescued from its dangerous predicament.

‘Heaven help us!’ exclaimed Lieut. Franklin, when the crisis was over. ‘I devoutly hope there’s not going to be much more of this sort of thing, and that we shall soon have some kind of plain sailing.’

His wish was gratified—for a while at least—the next day, when they arrived at the Dramstone, which was hailed with joy by the boatmen, because it marked the end of the laborious ascent of the Hill River, and was the beginning of some lake navigation, that was an exceedingly welcome change.

The custom was to celebrate the arrival at this spot by giving all the men a glass of spirits, and the lieutenant made no exception in this case.

He had not intended that Denis should be included in the distribution of grog, but the boy, who considered himself as much entitled to his glass as any

of the men, managed by dexterous diplomacy to get it.

Now it was very strong liquor, and it soon mounted to the foolish fellow's head, and stole away his senses. He began to sing and shout in a drunken fashion, and to make himself so ridiculous that Lieut. Franklin felt moved to reprove him, and to command him to be quiet.

But Denis was just intoxicated enough to take umbrage at being thus spoken to, and had the audacity to answer impertinently, whereupon the lieutenant, who was not a man to bandy words, even with a person in his right mind, and certainly was not going to waste any upon a foolish boy, ordered a couple of the Orkneymen to pick Denis up and drop him into a deep pool of water near the camping-ground.

The men, grinning from ear to ear at what they thought a fine joke, did as they were bid, despite Denis's desperate struggles and frantic cries.

With a big splash Denis was plunged into the pool all of a heap, followed close by Koyee, who had been leaping and snapping at the men while they had his master in hand.

The shock of the cold water had an immediate effect. He went under half drunk, he came out practically sober, and, having made haste ashore, darted off into the woods to conceal his confusion, amid roars of laughter from the whole camp.

He did not return until nightfall, and then he appeared in a very subdued state of mind, and his voluble tongue was silent for the evening. Evidently he had learnt a lesson that he would not soon forget.

After passing the Dramstone better progress was

made, and presently Oxford House on Holey Lake, an important post of the Hudson Bay Company, was reached, where a day's stay was made, in order to rest the men, and to get some of the ducks and trout that the big lake afforded.

At this shooting and fishing Denis did so well as quite to re-establish himself.

Accompanied by Lieut. Franklin and Dr. Richardson, he paddled across to the bay which the ducks frequented, and by concealing themselves in the shore they were able to bring down a number of brace, which Koyee cleverly retrieved for them.

The two midshipmen who went out with one of the men from the Post also had some luck, but their bag was much smaller than the lieutenant's, greatly to the latter's satisfaction, for he was a very keen sportsman.

In the afternoon they tried for the trout, and were again fortunate, some monsters weighing not less than forty pounds being taken.

These lake trout, although not so delicate in flavour as the smaller brook trout, were capital eating, and, together with the ducks, afforded a grateful change from the monotony of pemmican.

There was only one small encampment of Indians near Oxford House. They were of the Cree tribe, and were suffering from an epidemic of whooping-cough and measles, which made them miserable and dejected.

So far the Englishmen had been sorely disappointed. Of the Red man in his best aspect they had seen nothing, and they were beginning to wonder if there were any really fine Indians, or whether their size and dignity had not been greatly exaggerated.

‘I’m not surprised, after all, Denis, that you have so poor an opinion of the Indians, if they are all like this,’ remarked Lieut. Franklin, pointing to a miserable creature who was shuffling by, seeming scarce human in his utter wretchedness.

‘Oh! but these are bad Indians!’ responded Denis, eagerly. ‘We see good Indians sometimes. You wait, they are far away over there’; and with an expressive sweep of his hand he indicated the great North-west towards which they were travelling.

The lieutenant smiled. Evidently Denis had sufficient respect for his ancestry to be unwilling that any other than himself should speak contemptuously of the Red man; and, moreover, the dark stain in him did come from the Far North, where the natives were of a much finer type than the degenerate specimens hitherto encountered.

‘Then there are some good Indians, in spite of what you have said about them,’ returned Lieut. Franklin banteringly. ‘Well, we’ll take your word for it, and wait until we come upon them.’

They had a grand feast at Oxford House that night upon the ducks and trout, of which enough for all had been obtained; and Denis won great applause by his flute-playing, to which some of them danced in a lively fashion.

Then came an hour of smoking and story-telling, after which followed sleep and silence.

Making an early start from Oxford House, the boats, still keeping together at Lieut. Franklin’s earnest request, crossed Holey Lake, ascended the Weepenapanis, a narrow grassy river that was easy to navigate, overcame the difficulties of the swampy portage, where, however, two of the boats were

injured on the rocks, and thus made a good twenty miles' advance.

The following day was marked by a tragedy that cast a gloom over the whole company.

The boats had come to a place where the river rushed with tremendous force through the channels formed by two rocky islands, and it was necessary to drag them up one of these channels.

The first of the Company's boats got through all right, but when the second was being dragged up, the towing line suddenly broke, and a boatman, who was at the moment just on the edge of the rocky bank, lost his balance, and fell into the furious torrent.

Unhappily, he struck his head in the fall, and was thus rendered insensible, so that he could do nothing to save himself.

His companions looked on aghast, but made no effort to rescue him.

Not so Lieut. Franklin. It was not in him to allow a fellow being to perish without attempting to help him. As the poor fellow came swirling down, the lieutenant, calling out, 'Lend a hand with the rope, I'm going to try for him!' leaped into the boiling whirlpool at the foot of the cascade.

CHAPTER IV

BIRDS AND BEARS

THERE was a simultaneous shout of surprise and admiration at Lieut. Franklin's gallant action, for it was daring in the extreme. He was running the double risk of being drowned in the merciless torrent and dashed against the cruel rocks. But he recked not of either, in his noble ardour for saving a brother's life.

Denis, with countenance full of anxiety and fear, stood upon a rock, crying out :

'Take care, sir ; take care ! It will kill you ! It will kill you !'

He meant the water, which indeed seemed striving its utmost to overwhelm the brave officer, and into which he would have instantly plunged, if he could have been of any service.

In the meantime the tow-line had been hurriedly detached from the boat, and Dr. Richardson, standing as close to the edge of the whirlpool as he might, prepared to throw it.

The lieutenant had quickly realized the impossibility of doing anything for the unfortunate boatman. He was himself almost powerless in the grasp of the torrent, and could scarce keep his own head above water, let alone render that service to another. He

therefore fought his way with all his strength towards Dr. Richardson, and at last, by a supreme effort, caught the rope as it was dexterously thrown to him.

Great care had to be exercised in drawing the lieutenant in, lest he should be whirled against a rock by the seething waters; but at last this was safely managed, and dripping, breathless, and exhausted he was dragged ashore.

‘The poor fellow!’ he panted out. ‘I thought I might save him; but there’s no doing anything in that dreadful place.’

It was an hour later ere the body of the ill-fated boatman was recovered, and then they found his face bruised and battered almost beyond recognition.

They buried him on one of the islands, and conferred upon him the melancholy honour of calling it after him, so that it is known as John Moore’s Island to this day.

Continuing their inland voyage, the first day of October found them at Hell Gate, a romantic defile, whose rocky walls, rising perpendicularly to the height of nearly a hundred feet heavenward, hem in the stream for some distance so closely that there was scarce room to ply the oars.

This defile terminated in a grand and picturesque rapid, which occasioned a long portage; and while this was being overcome, Denis took his gun to see if he could secure some addition to the larder.

Mr. Hood accompanied him, and they had not gone far when the half-breed’s keen eyes discovered the nest of a brown fishing eagle placed upon one of the projecting cliffs, and pointed it out to his companion.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Mr. Hood, ‘let us watch it for a

while, and see if the eagle returns. I should so like to get one of these splendid birds.'

Denis was quite ready to fall in with his suggestion, so they concealed themselves in a place that commanded a clear view of the nest.

They were not kept waiting long. Within a quarter of an hour the eagle came into sight, sweeping around in great glorious curves that filled Mr. Hood's heart with envy.

'Ah! if we could only travel that way, Denis,' he said, with a longing sigh, 'instead of this tiresome tracking up river and toiling across portages, how soon we'd reach our journey's end!'

The eagle, evidently suspecting the designs of the two intruders upon its domain, did not at once make for the nest, but, after sweeping around in an uncertain way, presently alighted upon a pointed crag that overlooked the river.

The distance was too great for Denis's gun, and he therefore set out to stalk the eagle, Mr. Hood remaining where he was, lest by a slip or tumble he should spoil the boy's game. Very slowly and silently Denis crept nearer, and still the big bird stayed motionless.

At last he got within range, and, levelling his gun, fired.

The eagle darted into the air, flapping his wings frantically, and then disappeared into the ravine below.

The same moment Denis also vanished, for the ledge upon which he had been standing suddenly gave way under his feet, and down he went into the gully beneath him.

Realizing that something must have happened, Mr. Hood made haste to the spot, and found Denis

prone on his back, and bleeding freely from a nasty gash in his forehead.

‘Hullo, my lad!’ exclaimed the officer, in a tone full of concern. ‘Are you badly hurt?’

Denis did not respond at once. He was suffering a great deal of pain, and would have liked to relieve his feelings by letting out the groans that rose within him, but his pride held them back, and instead he managed to say, with a brave attempt at indifference:

‘Just my head’s cut;’ and then, with more vivacity, ‘The eagle. Did I kill him?’

‘I’m pretty sure you did,’ answered Mr. Hood. ‘He tumbled over the same time as you did. Let me fix up your head, and we’ll go and hunt for him.’

Denis’s cut having been bound up with a handkerchief, the two then made their way to the ravine into which the eagle had fallen. There they found him stretched out in death—a magnificent bird, so large and heavy that they had some difficulty in carrying him back to camp.

Mr. Hood was delighted with their success, and, as their prize could not be preserved, made a careful sketch of it, while Denis, plucking out one of the big tail feathers, placed it in his cap as a trophy and ornament.

The next day was one of unusual toil, as they spent the whole of it carrying the cargo of the boat over a portage nearly a mile in length, and dragging the empty boat up the cascade, and over many ridges of rock that obstructed navigation.

At this place Lieut. Franklin’s attention was attracted by a curious-looking tree which stood in a prominent place.

It was a tall pine, which had been divested of all

its lower branches, and left with only a small tuft of foliage at the top.

‘What is that for, Denis?’ he inquired. ‘It looks so strange that it must mean something.’

‘Ah, yes,’ replied Denis. ‘That lop-stick.’

‘Lop-stick!’ responded the lieutenant. ‘I’m no wiser than before. What is the lop-stick for?’

Denis then proceeded to explain. These lop-sticks, which were quite common along the route of the *voyageurs*, and were very useful in pointing out the way, were tributes to the liberality of some man who wanted his name remembered.

To accomplish this, he would at his own expense give his companions a treat in the way of as much rum as they could drink.

In return for his hospitality they would strip the tree of its branches, and ever after designate the tree by his name.

These lop-sticks were therefore memorials of foolish pride and drunken sprees; yet, as they also did good service as signposts, they were carefully preserved.

In the course of the afternoon Lieut. Franklin had an awkward accident, which might have proved more serious than it did. Whilst on his way to superintend the operations of the men, a stratum of loose moss slipped from under his feet, and he fell off the summit of the bank into the river betwixt two of the falls. It was a nasty place, where the rocks within reach were worn so smooth by the action of the water as to afford him no hold, and he was being rapidly carried down towards the lower cascade, when happily Koyee perceived him, and set up such a barking as to attract the attention of two of the men.

They, thinking the dog was baying some animal,

went to see what it was, and found the lieutenant struggling with all his might to keep himself from going over the falls.

They promptly rescued him from his perilous predicament, and he proved to have suffered no harm beyond the wetting, but a valuable chronometer he was carrying had been injured a great deal.

The approach of winter was announced by a sharp frost that night ; and the expedition realized that they must press forward with all possible speed, if they would reach good winter quarters ere further travelling would be impracticable.

They therefore worked day after day from dawn till dark, descending the Echenamis River, where they saw a number of beaver dams, and the Englishmen would have been glad to halt a while to study the ways of that interesting animal ; thence up the Sea River across the Play Green Lakes, and so to Norway House, an important post of the Hudson Bay Company at the north end of Lake Winnipeg.

On the way they had been overtaken by Governor Williams, of York Factory, who was travelling light, having simply one canoe with a couple of Indians, and they were therefore assured of a warm reception at Norway House, arriving under his auspices.

The water of Lake Winnipeg being rendered turbid by holding white clay in suspension, it was impossible to see the sunken rocks that abounded, and Lieut. Franklin's boat, while sailing before the breeze, struck so hard upon one of these rocks that the mast snapped off short just above the gunwale, causing no small panic on board, for they were at the time a good way from land.

Happily, however, the stout craft bore the buffet

bravely, and no harm was suffered save the loss of the mast, and this there was no difficulty in replacing.

Mr. Sutherland, the factor in charge at Norway House (which, by the way, got its rather odd name from the place having been first settled by a party of Norwegians, who were driven away from the Red River Colony by the commotions that took place there), told the English visitors an amusing legend, by which the Indians accounted for the muddiness of the waters of Lake Winnipeg and those adjoining it.

It seems that one of their deities, Weesakootchant by name, a mischievous fellow, something like Shakespeare's Puck, whom they hold in very little esteem, had been amusing himself by tormenting them beyond endurance.

In this emergency a clever old woman, by means of an ingenious artifice, succeeded in capturing him, for he was not invincible.

She thereupon called upon all the other women of the tribe to aid her in punishing him for his misdeeds ; and the mischievous sprite got out of their hands in so filthy a condition that it required all the waters of the great lake to wash him clean, and ever since it has been called Winnipeg, or muddy water.

After a brief but pleasant stay at Norway House, the expedition set sail upon the broad bosom of the lake, and, the wind being favourable, kept steadily on all night.

This respite from the toils of tracking and portaging was wonderfully welcome, and the boatmen were in high spirits as their sturdy craft went swiftly on, without calling for any exertion on their part.

They sang every song they knew, they told all their

best stories, and they made Denis give them every tune he could play on his flute.

It was a glorious night, the Aurora Borealis being in full splendour, and filling the whole heaven with its marvellous play of various and vivid colour.

Neither Lieut. Franklin nor any of his companions had ever seen the aurora in such plenitude and brilliancy before, and they were profoundly impressed by its supernal beauty.

‘Have you ever wondered what caused that, Denis?’ the lieutenant asked, after they had been enjoying the spectacle for a time.

‘Oh yes,’ replied Denis, in a bright, confident tone, ‘I know what makes it. A great chief who lives far up there,’ and he pointed due north, ‘told me about it.’

Repressing the smile that rose to his lips, Lieut. Franklin said encouragingly:

‘And will you tell me what the great chief told you?’

Much flattered at the request, Denis then proceeded to relate a long legend about the Manitous, or deities, who are supposed by the Indians to dwell in the region farthest north, and how they wage terrible wars upon each other, and how the marvellous illuminations of the aurora are simply the flashes from their weapons as they struggle fiercely for supremacy.

It was too pretty a legend to be spoiled by the application of scientific truth, and the lieutenant made no attempt to disturb Denis’s faith. There would be time enough for that, when he had had the opportunity of opening his young mind to an understanding of the one true God and His beneficent rule over the universe.

Making the most of the favouring breeze, the mouth of the Saskatchewan was reached by the midnight following, and there the pleasant easy sailing came to an end ; and the whole of the long wearisome day was spent in getting the boat from the river mouth to the foot of the Grand Rapid, a distance of only two miles.

During the delay Denis was detailed to try and secure some game, and, accompanied by Mr. Back and Koyee, he went off gaily, no less glad to escape the labours of the portage than he was to spend the day with his gun.

They found plenty of pelicans and several brown eagles fishing with great success in the troubled waters of the Rapid ; but they wasted none of their ammunition upon them, for they were out on business this time, and must needs have a good bag to show for their day's work.

Making their way warily along the shore, they presently came upon flocks of golden plover, from which they took heavy toll.

They were also fortunate in putting up pin-tailed grouse, of which they secured several brace ; and Mr. Back shot a striped marmot that was in a fine condition of plumpness ; so that they were quite ready to give an account of themselves when the time drew near for their return to camp.

But they were not going to get back without an adventure. As, heavily laden with their spoils, they were making as rapid progress as they could campward, Koyee, who had run on ahead and disappeared into a ravine, suddenly set up a furious barking.

On hearing this, Denis stopped, and listened intently for a moment, with a very eager expression of

countenance. 'Koyee find bear, me think,' he said, beginning to put down his load of game in order to gird himself for the attack.

'But we have no time to stop and kill it,' responded the midshipman, who was anxious to get back, that he might display the good results of the day's shooting.

Denis, however, was too full of the idea of bagging the bear, and thus having something more substantial to boast of than merely some birds and a harmless little marmot, to heed his companion's warning.

'Plenty time yet,' he answered. 'Come, we kill the bear'; and dropping everything save his gun, he rushed off to where Koyee was still barking noisily.

Feeling bound to support him, even though he did not approve of his action, Mr. Back followed; and on reaching the edge of the ravine they saw, in a sort of recess just opposite to them, a good-sized brown bear at bay to Koyee, who was barking and snapping with fine audacity.

'See him! See him!' cried Denis, quivering with excitement. 'We kill him quick!' and he hastened to ram a bullet down on top of the charge of shot with which his gun was already loaded.

Mr. Back thought it well to imitate his example, and then they both prepared to fire.

'You fire first, Denis,' said the midshipman, 'and if you don't kill him, I'll give him another shot.'

Denis was so excited that for a minute he could not take steady aim, but he had sense enough to wait until his nerves had quieted a little, and then, aiming at the bear's head, he fired.

To his vast delight, the creature, with a short, deep roar of pain, pitched forward so suddenly as to send

Koyee skittering backward panic-stricken, and then lay motionless.

'Me kill him! Me kill him!' shouted Denis exultantly; and, dropping his gun, he threw himself down into the ravine before Mr. Back, who thought him altogether too reckless, could interfere to restrain him.

Drawing his knife, Denis was about to plunge it into the bear's throat, when the animal, which had been only stunned not killed by the bullet, owing to the latter losing force through being put on the top of the shot, rose upon its hind legs, and with a savage growl threw its paws around Denis, while it strove to bury its teeth in his shoulder.

'Oh!' exclaimed Mr. Back, 'the boy will be killed!' and, gun in hand, he leaped into the ravine to his companion's rescue.

Matters certainly looked black, for Denis, struggle as he might, could not free himself from the bear's embrace; and so closely were they interlocked, that Mr. Back dare not fire, for fear of the bullet striking him instead of the animal.

Bitterly did the young fellow repent his rashness as he wrestled for his life, and glad would he have been to let the bear go free, if the creature would only release him from its deadly hug.

But of this the only chance lay through the bear's death, to accomplish which he himself was powerless, his knife having been knocked out of his hand in the struggle.

Koyee was doing all he could by biting viciously at the bear's flanks, and Mr. Back was dodging around, gun in hand, watching for a chance to fire.

At last he saw his opportunity. In their struggle to and fro Denis succeeded in breaking away a little

from the bear's grip, and the midshipman, putting the muzzle of his gun so close to the animal's head that the discharge burned the fur, pulled the trigger, blowing a hole right into bruin's brains.

Down dropped the bear, releasing Denis, who rolled over on his back so utterly exhausted as almost to lose consciousness for a moment; and Mr. Back, full of anxiety, hastened to pick him up, asking:

'Are you badly hurt, Denis? Let me see.'

Denis, who really thought himself half killed, on recovering his breath, moaned in a lamentable voice:

'Oh! I'm so hurt! I'm so hurt! I shall die for sure!'

'Not a bit of it, Denis,' responded Mr. Back cheerfully. 'You'll be all right again in a jiffy. Come, let me see where you are wounded.'

On examination it was found, to the inexpressible relief of both of them, that Denis's injuries were no worse than a bite on the shoulder, which was by no means serious, and some slight scratches under the arms, although his woollen shirt was almost torn into ribbons.

'You hurry back to camp, Denis,' said Mr. Back, 'and I'll come after you with the birds.'

'But the bear!' protested Denis, who had immediately recovered his self-possession, on realizing that he was not dangerously wounded.

'Oh! never mind the bear,' responded Mr. Back. 'You get along, and have your scratches looked after; we'll have to leave the bear.'

Very reluctantly Denis set off, and the midshipman, loading himself with all the game he could carry, followed more slowly, and thus they returned to camp through the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER V

SAFE INTO WINTER QUARTERS

DENIS'S appearance at the camp alone, and manifestly the worse for an encounter with some wild animal, caused considerable consternation, which the young rascal, who was very fond of teasing, and who, moreover, enjoyed being the centre of interest, was in no hurry to allay; and it was not until Lieut. Franklin came up and demanded the exact truth that he told just what had happened.

He had hardly finished his narration when Mr. Back appeared, bending beneath the load of game, which he had bravely carried the whole way, knowing well enough that had he left any of it behind, there would not have been a feather of it seen in the morning. He was hailed with shouts of congratulation upon his good luck, for which he took care to give the chief credit to Denis; and that night at Grand Rapids they had a fine feast upon the delicious game.

The long portage having been successfully surmounted, there followed some easy rowing up the Saskatchewan, which there widened out into a broad, smooth stream.

The fur-traders' route from Canada to the Athabasca joined that from York Factory at this part

of the Saskatchewan, and the Hudson Bay men, with whom Lieut. Franklin's party still kept company, were thrown into great excitement by observing signs of a recent encampment of the North-West Fur Company's men.

The employés of the two great fur companies were then at deadly enmity, the rivalry for the monopoly of the profitable trade in peltries having reached the stage of violence, and much blood having been already shed.

'I hope we shall not catch up with them until we reach Cumberland House, at any rate,' said Governor Williams, in a voice full of concern. 'My men are feeling very bitter because of the North-West Company's actions, and I could not speak for the consequences if we were to come upon their party.'

Every preparation was made for a fight, the guns being all loaded with ball or heavy buck-shot, and scouts being sent ahead through the woods, to prevent the possibility of an ambushade.

Denis was in great hopes of the enemy being encountered. He was a fiery partisan of the Hudson Bay Company. He regarded the employés of the other company as robbers and rascals who could not be too severely dealt with, and Lieut. Franklin was much amused by his fierce denunciation of them.

'But, Denis,' he argued, by way of drawing the boy out, 'have they not as much right to go after furs in this country as the Hudson Bay people? There's plenty of room for both, surely.'

'No, sir,' responded Denis, with flashing eyes and heightened colour. 'They've no business here at all. The big Company' (meaning of course the Hudson Bay) 'was here first, and the country belongs to

them, and the others should be made to go away, and if they won't go they should be killed, that's all.'

'Why, you bloodthirsty young rascal!' exclaimed the lieutenant, smiling in spite of himself. 'Are those your ideas of law and order? It's to be hoped you'll never have a chance to carry them out.'

Not knowing how far Denis would go in the satisfaction of his animosity if the opportunity offered, Lieut. Franklin thought it well to keep him close by him all day.

Denis rather resented this, as he would have much preferred being ahead with the scouts, but the lieutenant was firm, and he had perforce to obey orders.

It was an anxious time for all. Governor Williams had no wish to be embroiled in any conflict, and Lieut. Franklin, who hoped to obtain assistance from the officers of both Companies in the course of his long journey, was deeply anxious that no collision should take place while he was at hand, for it would inevitably put him in a very difficult and delicate position.

The majority of the men, however, were, so to speak, spoiling for a fight. The North-Westerns had got decidedly the best of recent *rencontres*, and the Hudson Bays were eager to redeem themselves.

Traversing Cross Lake, the boats, after passing through several winding channels formed by a cluster of islands, entered Cedar Lake, that seemed nearly as long as Lake Winnipeg, and here they encountered a violent storm which compelled them to run for shelter to a small island that was nothing more than a heap of bare stones rolled up by the waves, in

which exposed situation they had to pass the night in great discomfort.

But the following day was fine, and they sailed steadily until evening, the Company's boats being well in the lead, and Lieut. Franklin's lagging behind, owing to its heavily-laden condition, when, on sweeping round a projecting point into a sort of bay that was to be their camping-place, they came full upon the North-Westerns, who had been there since the middle of the day.

At a glance the Hudson Bays saw that they had the stronger force, and, without waiting for Governor Williams, who, as it happened, was on board Lieut. Franklin's boat, prepared for an attack.

Every gun was carefully seen to, knives and hatchets were slipped into belts, and the outlook for a bloody conflict was ominous.

The North-Westerns, being taken by surprise, were at first thrown into confusion, but quickly rallied, and gathering about their boats where they were drawn up on the shore, made ready to give their enemies a warm reception.

Yet both parties hesitated to fire the first shot. They needed to work themselves to the point of blood-shedding, and so they opened upon each other with a volley of taunts and insulting epithets, the Hudson Bays calling the others interlopers, robbers, and so forth, and the latter retorting in equally strong phrase.

Matters were rapidly approaching a crisis, but no blow had yet been struck, when Lieut. Franklin's boat came up.

There was no mistaking the serious nature of the situation. At any moment the pulling of a trigger

might precipitate a deadly conflict. Lieut. Franklin did not for an instant hesitate as to the part he should play.

Standing up in the bow of the boat, he pulled out his handkerchief, and waving it on high shouted :

‘A truce! a truce! Let no one fire!’

This interposition was so unexpected, and there was something so resolute in the Englishman’s attitude and so commanding in his voice, that a silence fell upon all, and they waited to hear what he should say.

‘Brothers,’ he cried, as he thus stood between the two parties of embattled men, ‘shed not one another’s blood, I beseech you. I am here in the name of your King to travel over this great land, and it would grieve my heart to see you fighting like foes, instead of living as friends. Put down your guns, and let us talk this matter over in peace.’ Then turning to Governor Williams, who was just beside him, he said :

‘Command your men to put down their guns, sir, and see if the others will not do likewise.’

The governor issued the order, and the men rather slowly and sulkily did his bidding.

‘Now, my friends,’ said Lieut. Franklin to the North-Westerns, with a genial smile of confidence, ‘won’t you put down your guns too? You see, we trust you not to take any unfair advantage of us.’

With more alacrity, for they were not really anxious to fight, the North-Westerns lowered their guns; and having thus gained his first point, Lieut. Franklin called out :

‘Now we will land over there,’ pointing to a place a hundred yards away from the other camp,

'and when we are ashore we will talk and smoke together.'

A crisis being thus, for the moment at least, averted, the Hudson Bays landed quietly, and set about preparing their camp, the North-Westerns watching their every movement; for, although they had been sufficiently impressed by Lieut. Franklin's apparent sincerity to refrain from taking the initiative, still they were not entirely sure that the whole thing might not be a clever ruse to put them at a disadvantage.

While the fires were being made and the evening meal prepared, the lieutenant, noticing the unusual gloom on Denis's countenance, asked him if there was anything the matter with him.

It was not Denis's way to beat about the bush. When he had anything on his mind he was prone to speak it out at the first opportunity, and so, without any parrying of the question, he replied:

'It was so good a chance. Why didn't we attack them? We could have beaten them easily.'

'What, Denis!' exclaimed Lieut. Franklin. 'Still spoiling for a fight! What have you against the North-Westerns that you would wipe them out of existence if you could?'

'They killed my father!' answered Denis, in a low voice that fairly thrilled with passion. 'And I would kill them—yes, every one, if I only could!'

Lieut. Franklin started. It was the first he had known of this tragedy, and for a moment he was disposed to be incredulous.

But there could be no doubting the truth of the boy's statement if one looked into his face, and, filled with sympathy for him, the lieutenant, putting his hand tenderly upon his shoulder, said gently:

'I did not know that, Denis. You never told me before, and I feel for you deeply. But even then, my boy, to seek blood for blood is not the Christian way. We must try to return good for evil, and to heap coals of fire upon the heads of our enemies. The North-Westerns have certainly done you an irreparable wrong, but it will only make matters worse, not better, for you to try and revenge yourself upon them.'

Denis shook his head, but remained silent. The strain of Indian blood was too strong for him to readily resign all thoughts of revenge upon those who were, as he believed, his father's murderers; and at that moment the talk was interrupted by the welcome announcement of supper being ready.

When the men had eaten, and were getting their pipes ready for a good smoke, Lieut. Franklin went over to the North-Westerns with proposals of peace; and so well did he play the part of ambassador that, without much parleying, a hard-and-fast agreement not to molest each other in any way was come to, and all danger of hostilities removed.

This was particularly advantageous, seeing that the two parties were travelling the same route, and would inevitably encounter each other frequently.

Matters being thus amicably arranged, the men interchanged visits, and being granted an extra allowance of tobacco by their respective chiefs, had a very sociable and pleasant night of it.

Continuing up the Saskatchewan, the boats made good progress for several days, the country being low and the river free from rapids.

Winter was now rapidly approaching, the frost being very sharp, and yielding only to the full force of the sun at noonday.

Great flocks of geese and ducks were seen flying southward, but too far off to be shot at.

On the morning of October 20, an encampment of Indians engaged in killing water-fowl for winter food was reached. The members of the expedition were greatly interested in the tent which the bird-hunters occupied.

It was an immense affair, being some forty feet in length by nearly twenty in breadth, and made of moose-deer leather, having apertures at each end for the escape of the smoke from the two fires burning within.

A ledge of wood was placed on the ground on both sides, the whole length of the tent, within which were the sleeping-places arranged according to the families, and in the centre was a pile of drums and other instruments of enchantment.

Amongst the occupants of this huge tent were several half-breeds, who, preferring wild life to the restraint of the Fur Company's Posts, where, as a rule, discipline was strictly maintained, had cast in their lot with the savage side of each family.

Governor Williams doled out a dram of spirits and a piece of tobacco to each of the males, whereat they were greatly pleased. Here Denis had an exciting time of it for a while, owing to his devotion to Koyee.

This lively animal, whose spirit was no less enterprising and pugnacious than that of his master, entertained quite a vigorous contempt for the dogs that hung about the Indian camps.

They were miserable, half-starved creatures, to be sure, and presented a striking contrast to his sleek, well-fed appearance.

Now it would have shown more sagacity on Koyee's part to remain by his own camp, but he must needs go over to the big tent on a little tour of investigation, and as a matter of course soon fell into a noisy altercation with some of the Indian dogs.

From barks to bites the advance was rapid, and presently the visitor was the centre of the bewildering vortex of snarling, snapping canine life, from which there seemed small chance of his emerging intact.

Denis, who was playing his flute for the delectation of the North-Westerns, knew nothing of his dog's danger, until one of the boatmen shouted to him :

'Denis, your dog 'll be killed over there if you don't get him out of that lively.'

The flute was out of Denis's mouth in an instant, and, snatching up a hatchet, he rushed over to the scene of the conflict.

Koyee was being hard pressed, having no less than four assailants to cope with, and, strong and agile as he was, he could not gain any advantage, when Denis dashed up, and with quick blows of his hatchet placed two of the Indian dogs *hors de combat*.

He would have treated the whole four similarly, had not a big half-breed rushed upon him, and, grabbing the hatchet, made as though he would strike him with it, calling out :

'You kill my dogs. I kill you !'

He looked quite capable of carrying out his threat, for he was an ugly fellow, and evidently in a great rage, so that Denis, being entirely unarmed, seemed in a serious strait. But he was equal to the emergency. Darting forward suddenly, he drove his head into the pit of the half-breed's stomach with such

force as to knock him over completely winded, the hatchet dropping from his grasp as he fell; and ere he could recover himself, Denis picked it up, called Koyee to him, and raced back to his own camp at the top of his speed.

The half-breed made no attempt to follow him. He knew he would get no consideration from the Company's men, and wisely preferred to swallow his discomfiture rather than expose himself to their ridicule.

There was a heavy snowstorm that night, and the weather next day was extremely cold and stormy, so that the travellers had a most uncomfortable time of it.

The wind was directly opposed to their course, and the spray that came in over the bows of the boats froze as it fell, while the oars got so loaded with ice as to be almost unmanageable.

Leaving the Saskatchewan, they entered the Little River, one of the streams by which Pine Island Lake discharged its waters, and pushed forward as rapidly as circumstances permitted, yet one day they made only eleven miles' advance.

Cumberland House was the goal which—they were pressing for it—must be reached ere the frost closed the rivers, or the boats would have to be abandoned.

Once safe at the Post, they could remain until the return of spring unlocked the streams again, and made it possible to continue the journey.

This race against the weather was a very exciting one. From dawn till dark everybody toiled unsparingly. There were no shirkers, for it was to the interest of all to make their destination in time.

Through blinding snowstorms and thickening ice the boats were urged on, until at last a lively dash

across Pine Island Lake brought them to the landing-place before Cumberland House. Yet not to the right landing-place either, for the margin of the lake was so encrusted with ice that a little canal had to be cut through it ere the boats could reach the actual shore, and be drawn up upon it.

But the eagerly desired goal had been attained. Here the whole party could abide in security and comfort during the long winter months; and in token of their delight the men ranged up in a line on shore and fired off a *feu de joie* that sounded very fine, and evoked a response in kind from the garrison of the post. As soon as his party had got their quarters assigned them by Governor Williams, Lieut. Franklin paid a visit to the Post of the North-West Fur Company, which stood within sight of Cumberland, for the two rivals had their establishments thus side by side that they might the better keep watch upon each other.

He was cordially received by Mr. Connolly, the resident partner, to whom he had a letter of introduction from the head of the Company, and was assured that the North-Westerns would be instructed to forward the progress of the expedition by every means in their power.

Having thus ensured the goodwill and co-operation of both the great fur companies, the lieutenant could settle down for the winter with an easy mind, and await the return of spring with cheerful expectation.

As soon as the ice on the lake had well taken, which was by the end of the first week in November, the dogs' sledges were sent off to Swampy River, for the supply of fish that had been gathered by a party stationed there for the purpose.

This mode of conveyance being an entire novelty to the English officers, they asked leave to accompany the sledges.

Denis and Koyee also joined the party, and they set off one fine morning in high spirits, the dogs seeming to enjoy the outing no less than the men.

It was fine going across the frozen bosom of the lake, and the Englishmen were invited to be seated on the sledges, while the others ran alongside.

With shouting and laughter, and good-humoured challenges to little spurts of races, the irregular procession made its way to Swampy River, the sledges being several times upset *en route*, and their occupants unceremoniously tumbled out on the hard snow.


It happened that just as the camps at Swampy River came into sight, the four sledges, upon each of which sat one of the Englishmen, were quite close together, and that there was good going the remainder of the distance.

‘A race! a race!’ shouted one of the drivers. ‘Let us have a race!’ The others were quite ready, and with no loss of time the matter was arranged.

The sledges were drawn up in line, the drivers with difficulty restraining their eager animals. Lieut. Franklin, Dr. Richardson, Mr. Hood, and Mr. Back settled themselves down as firmly as they could in their places, the word was given by the official in command of the party, and amid a chorus of whip-cracking and shouts of encouragement the sledges started off at a furious pace, those on foot following behind as best they could.

CHAPTER VI

THE MOOSE HUNT

HE dog-sledge race was not a long one, but it proved very exciting. The teams were about evenly matched, and, the course being free from obstacles, were able to put forth their utmost speed.

The sledges swayed from side to side as they dashed forward, in a way that gave their inexperienced riders many a thrill of apprehension, lest they should be flung out upon the hard snow ; but no upsets occurred, and at length, after a fierce spurt at the finish, Dr. Richardson's sledge was declared the winner by a good length, Lieut. Franklin coming in second, and the two midshipmen neck and neck behind.

Denis was much disappointed at the chief's defeat. 'Your dogs not run right,' he said to him, 'they should be whipped hard'; and he looked as if he would like very much to perform the operation.

But the lieutenant laughed at him.

'Not a bit of it, Denis,' he responded. 'They did their best, and we had a fine run of it, anyway. I enjoyed it immensely, even though I didn't get first place.'

The fishermen had caught a large quantity of fish, and these, being loaded on the sledges, were drawn

to the fort, where they made a welcome addition to the daily bill of fare, which was apt to prove very monotonous during the long winter.

The accommodation of Cumberland House not being equal to the demands of so large a party as Lieut. Franklin's, it had been necessary for his men to complete a half-finished house that was within the palisade.

This they accomplished in the course of a week, and then the whole expedition moved in. At first they found it extremely cold, in spite of the big fires they maintained ; but by banking it around with snow, and filling in all the chinks and cracks, they finally succeeded in making it tolerably comfortable.

As it was to be their dwelling until spring, Lieut. Franklin spared no pains to have it as cosy as possible, being anxious that his men should keep in good spirits all the winter, so that they might be ready for a start when the time came to take up their journey again.

There were not many Indians in the vicinity of the Post, and the most of them were in a wretched condition, owing to an epidemic of whooping-cough and measles. They were constantly coming in to beg for provisions, their hunters being in too debilitated a state to go out and obtain food for their families.

One old and faithful hunter, who had done good service to the Company, was brought to the fort in a dying condition, in the hope that the extra warmth and better nourishment might save him. But it was of no avail, as he died a few days afterwards.

Shortly before he died, Lieut. Franklin and Denis, who were out for a walk together, discovered the old hunter sitting in the saw-pit, and busily employed

gathering the dry dust in big handfuls, which he threw over his body. The day was piercingly cold, and the old man was naked to the waist, yet he kept this up for a long time, while they watched him without his observing them.

‘What can that be for, Denis?’ inquired the lieutenant. ‘Such exposure on a bitter day like this is enough to kill him on the spot.’

Denis shrugged his shoulders, and curled his lips contemptuously. ‘He big fool, that’s all,’ he said, with a fine air of superiority.

This explanation not seeming sufficient, Lieut. Franklin applied to the residents of the fort for information; but they could not enlighten him, beyond the suggestion that it was some ceremony by way of preparation for death, which the poor old man felt to be near at hand.

Towards the end of November a party was sent to the hunters’ tent at Basquiau Hill, some fifty miles distant, to bring in the supplies of moose-meat which it was hoped they had secured, and the Englishmen, being anxious to have some moose-hunting, arranged to accompany the sledges.

Of course Denis must go too. He was not to be left out of any sport if he could help it, and, seeing how expert he was with both gun and hunting-knife, he could not fail to be a valuable member of the party.

They set off at daybreak one morning, a large and merry party, taking six sledges with them, for they counted upon bringing back many hundred pounds of fine moose-meat. The road lay across the low ground in the neighbourhood of the fort, and through the forest into the distant hills, among whose valleys,

with their abundant growth of trees, the moose was to be found.

Denis could hardly contain himself for delight at the prospect of such hunting. Only once before had he had the opportunity, and then, being fortunate enough to bring down a splendid bull which had escaped the older members of the hunting-party, he had got such a conceit of himself that he thought no moose could withstand him.

'Oh, sir, but he was a fine one!' he said enthusiastically. 'Such horns!' and he spread his arms to their utmost extent to try and give some idea of their size. 'And he was so fat!' and he smacked his lips over the recollection of the juicy roasts his moose had furnished.

'Are they very hard to kill?' asked Lieut. Franklin, who was greatly hoping that he might be so fortunate as to bring low at least one of these forest monarchs.

'Oh yes,' exclaimed Denis, 'very hard. And they fight—oh! but they fight! They try to kill you, and you must run—run!' And his eyes dilated, and his frame quivered as though with mortal fear.

The French element in his nature made Denis a good actor. He well knew how to be dramatic in narration, and he delighted in putting emphasis upon what he was saying.

He was now anxious to impress upon the Englishmen the difficulties and dangers of moose-hunting, and he certainly did succeed in giving them the idea that it was a noble sport, well worthy of brave men.

There could be no sledge-racing on this trip. The trail ran over rough and uneven ground, for the most part, and the dogs required careful driving, else the sleighs would have been frequently upset.

The men were all on snow-shoes, to the use of which Lieut. Franklin and his companions were rapidly becoming accustomed, although they still found a long tramp trying, and on this occasion were fain to suggest a halt from time to time, in order to rest their weary muscles.

The weather continued fine, save for an occasional snow flurry, and the camp at Basquiau Hill was reached without special incident.

Here everything was found in a satisfactory condition, the hunters having already secured a goodly stock of meat, and reported that the moose were still plentiful not far away. To the Englishmen this was most welcome news, and they were impatient to begin the chase.

That night around the camp fire they heard many a thrilling tale of adventure with wounded moose which had sought to have revenge upon their enemies, and in some cases had only too well succeeded.

But these in nowise daunted them, and they were impatient for the morrow, when they might try their fortune. Bright and early next morning the moose-hunters set out, breaking up into small parties, and going in different directions, in order that all might have a chance at the big game.

Lieut. Franklin had, as guide, a tall, sinewy half-breed, named Pierre Grosbois, to whom he promised a silver dollar if he put him in the way of shooting a good big moose.

Pierre was a veteran hunter, and in his presence Denis dwindled to a mere tyro, the lieutenant giving all his attention to the older hand.

Denis felt this, and showed it by being unusually silent; but in his heart he was resolved that ere the

day was over he would do something to show that he was not to be despised.

Pierre, on his part, rather resented Denis being with them; he would have preferred having Lieut. Franklin to himself; and he gave vent to his feeling in some stage asides of a very personal bearing, that made Denis's eyes flash dangerously, and his tawny cheeks redden with rage, so that the lieutenant felt it expedient to intervene, and to command Pierre to desist.

As they would likely be out overnight, they took with them two days' provisions and ample means for making fires. The country they traversed was very hilly, with little bits of level land tucked away among the folds of the hills, and abounded in trees whose young branches afforded food for the big animal of which the hunters were in quest.

'Moose do that,' said Pierre, pointing to a birch-tree which had been bent down to the ground and stripped clean of every leaf and twig.

'Why, how did he manage it?' inquired Lieut. Franklin, who saw that the height of the tree far exceeded that of the animal, and therefore could not understand how he reached the top.

'Easy enough,' replied Pierre. 'He got on the tree like this'—and he put his legs astride his gun, and pressed forward upon it, thus making clear how cleverly the moose would ride down a slender tree-trunk, and bring every part of it within reach of his mouth.

'I should like very much to see one do it,' said Franklin.

'Maybe, yes,' answered Pierre; 'we'll see'; and he looked very important, as though he knew all the

secrets of the forests, and could do pretty much what he wanted.

They tramped on until midday, seeing many tracks of moose printed in the snow, but nothing of the animals that made them. At the halt for dinner they lighted no fire, lest the smoke should reach the nostrils of the moose, who are wonderfully keen of scent, but just had a cold snack, and after a brief rest, during which the men even denied themselves their customary pipe, set off again.

By this time they were in the very heart of the moose range, and they proceeded very cautiously, as at any moment the game might be sighted.

Pierre went ahead, holding his gun ready to fire on the instant; Lieut. Franklin came next, watching eagerly every movement of his leader; and Denis brought up the rear, having Koyee in leash, for to have allowed him freedom would have been to spoil all chances of a kill.

In this fashion they had gone some hundreds of yards, and Pierre had just reached the crest of the hill, beyond which was a wooded valley, when he stopped short, threw himself silently down on the snow, and beckoned to Lieut. Franklin to come up to him.

With throbbing pulse the lieutenant obeyed, dropping on the snow beside the guide.

'See there!' cried Pierre, in a triumphant whisper. 'Ah—but that is fine!'

The English officer peeped cautiously over the top of the ridge, and the sight that met his eyes was certainly sufficient to make every nerve thrill with joy.

In the vale below was a small moose yard, holding

within its well-defined limits a splendid bull, two fine cows, and a couple of yearlings.

They were all in the best of condition, and were nibbling at the tree-twigs in perfect unconsciousness of danger.

Now, in order that their shot might not be wasted, it was necessary that an order of attack should be arranged, so, slipping noiselessly back behind the hill, the hunters held a consultation in whispers, the result of which was that the big bull fell to the lot of Lieut. Franklin. Pierre took the fattest cow, and Denis was assigned one of the yearlings. He sniffed contemptuously at this, and said he would prefer helping Lieut. Franklin to kill the bull; but as the latter wished, if possible, to have the full glory of the victory, he declined the proffered assistance.

‘Let me have the first shot anyway, Denis,’ he said, with a hopeful smile, ‘and if I need you to help me finish him, I will call upon you.’

Crawling back to the top of the ridge, they found the moose still unsuspecting, but huddled together in such a way that they did not offer a good chance for the guns.

It was therefore necessary that they should be disturbed, and accordingly Koyee was unleashed and set upon them. He darted down the hillside, barking fiercely, and instantly the little herd of moose was thrown into confusion. The bull bristled up at once, and, lowering his broad antlers, prepared to receive the audacious intruder upon their points, while the cows and yearlings, after a moment’s bewildered hesitancy, started off down the vale at a lumbering gallop.

Almost as one the reports of the three guns rang out, and every bullet found its mark.

Pierre's cow, shot through the heart, staggered a few paces, and then fell upon the snow, which fast reddened with her blood.

Denis's bullet smashed the shoulder-blade of the yearling, making further flight impossible; while Lieut. Franklin, having to fire at the bull's head, struck him between the eyes, so as to temporarily stun him and bring him to his knees. So overcome with exultation at the success of the shot as to throw all prudence to the winds, the lieutenant rushed down the slope, hunting-knife in hand, exclaiming, 'He's down! he's down! I must finish him,' followed by Pierre, shouting out, 'Take care, sir, the moose not dead! Take care!' while Denis wisely waited a moment to reload his gun, and then went after the others at a more deliberate pace, for he still felt piqued at being made to fire at the yearling. Koyee was baying the bull, who had now regained his feet, and was making furious efforts to toss the troublesome animal; but when the men appeared, the moose, turning away from the dog, promptly charged upon them with a blood-curdling bellow.

Being on snow-shoes, Lieut. Franklin could not move as quickly as if in his ordinary foot-gear, and it looked as though he would not be able to evade the maddened animal's charge, when Pierre effected a diversion by shouting and waving his arms, so as to draw the attention of the bull to himself. The snow-shoes were no encumbrance to him, and he dodged among the trees cleverly, the bull roaring and snorting after him, while he shouted to the others:

'Kill him! kill him! quick! quick!' But the lieutenant was in such a state of excitement that his hands were not steady enough to reload his gun

properly, and Denis seemed in no hurry to fire, the fact of the matter being that he was greatly relishing the scene, not being deeply concerned about Pierre's danger.

'Fire at him, Denis! fire at him!' shouted the lieutenant, as he strove desperately to ram a tight bullet down into his gun.

Pierre's situation was fast becoming serious. The snow was hard enough to bear the broad feet of the moose, and he could manœuvre upon it as freely as if upon the ground. Indeed, were it not for Koyee, who sprang at his head with splendid audacity, and thus confused him, he would certainly have overtaken Pierre.

At last the hard-pressed hunter, in trying to make a sudden turn, caught his snow-shoes together, and pitched headlong, calling out to the others to save him as he fell.

In an instant the infuriated bull was upon him, and, in spite of Koyee's reckless charge, would soon have stamped and gored the life out of him, had not Denis, who was just waiting for this moment, taken careful aim at the great creature's side, and sent his bullet straight into his heart.

With one dreadful roar the bull threw up his head, and rolled over almost on top of Pierre, who just managed to scramble out of his way as he fell.

'Hurrah, Denis!' exclaimed Lieut. Franklin, vastly relieved at his guide's deliverance, 'you did that splendidly. I was afraid you'd be too late.'

Denis, looking as well pleased with himself as a young bantam-cock that has just put to flight an aspiring rival, said :

'I shoot straight, sir, every time'; and then stooping

down to pat the head of the prostrate moose, he added, 'Fine big fellow, eh?' e

Meantime Pierre, having picked himself up, re-loaded his gun without one word of gratitude to his deliverer, or of praise for the excellence of his marksmanship.

'Why, Pierre,' said Lieut. Franklin, 'you haven't thanked Denis for coming to your assistance. But for him you'd probably have been a dead man by this time, for the bullet got stuck tight in my gun, and I couldn't ram it down.'

But Pierre was in too bad a humour to do the right thing. He was provoked with himself for having let the moose get the better of him, and he was still more provoked that Denis should have been the one to rescue him from his perilous plight. Had it been Lieut. Franklin, he would not have minded at all, but he could not forgive Denis for winning the honours of the occasion.

So, without vouchsafing any reply, he proceeded to the task of skinning and cutting up the carcase of the fallen animal.

This unattractive job, in which both the lieutenant and Denis assisted to the best of their ability, took a considerable time, and when the task was finished the sun had sunk low in the horizon.

The problem now was what to do with the fine supply of meat that had been obtained. To leave it at the place while they went back to Cumberland House for sledges, would be simply to make a present of it to the wolves, and thus have all their labour for nothing.

It was therefore necessary that it should be guarded until it could be conveyed to the fort.

Pierre now saw an opportunity of recovering his lost prestige, and proposed a plan that certainly did credit to his courage and skill as a hunter.

This was that Lieut. Franklin and Denis should remain by the meat while he set off alone for the fort.

To accomplish this, meant that he should tramp for long hours back over the way they had come, at the risk of attack from wild animals, and with the chance of being lost, even though the moon was well advanced towards full.

Lieut. Franklin opposed this, urging that they should all remain until morning, and then Pierre could make his trip without danger.

But the *voyageur* was not to be dissuaded. He was just in the humour for some wild enterprise, and accordingly, after a substantial supper on broiled moose-steak, he set off, warning Lieut. Franklin to keep the fire going all night, for they might count upon having a visit from wolves.

It was with great reluctance that the lieutenant saw Pierre start. He would have much preferred his remaining; and as soon as he had gone he set to work with Denis, preparing a supply of firewood sufficient to last through the night. This being accomplished, they sat down to rest, both feeling very tired, yet fully realizing that there would be little sleep for them that night.

Koyee's presence was a great comfort. He could be relied upon to give warning of the approach of any enemy, and although he now lay dozing after a good supper, he was ready for action at a moment's notice.

It was getting on towards midnight, and, in spite of

their efforts to keep awake, both Lieut. Franklin and Denis had fallen asleep, when Koyee sprang up with bristling hair and ears acock. He did not bark; he listened intently, his white teeth gleaming through his black lips; and Denis, aroused from his nap, listened with him, to hear coming distinctly through the still night air a sound that he instantly recognized as the howl of the great grey wolf.

CHAPTER VII

CHRISTMAS AT CUMBERLAND HOUSE

THE instant Denis understood the character of the nocturnal sound which had set Koyee all alert, he roused Lieut. Franklin, saying :

‘There are the wolves. Come, let us be ready.’

First throwing more wood upon the fire, so that it blazed up fiercely, they looked to their guns to make sure that they were all right, and then to their hunting-knives and hatchets. Unless they should lose their wits with panic, of which contingency there was little chance, the wolves were bound to get a warm reception, whatever might be their number.

Of course, as a last resort, there were trees to be climbed, which would afford safe shelter until the men should come from the fort ; but to take to the trees would mean to expose the meat to the ravages of the grey robbers, and neither the lieutenant nor Denis entertained any thought of doing that.

The first long howl had been responded to by others from different directions, and had been answered back, until the blood-curdling music gathered into a chorus whose volume showed that the rapacious prowlers were in strong force.

‘Many wolves! Oh, many, many!’ exclaimed Denis, not in a frightened way, but just seeming

anxious that Lieut. Franklin should realize the gravity of the situation.

‘Yes, Denis,’ he responded composedly. ‘But we will keep them off, won’t we? We are in the hands of Providence, and I have no fear.’

So absolute was Lieut. Franklin’s trust in Divine protection, and faith in his own mission, that he was almost a fatalist. He believed he had work to do which must needs be done by him, and until it was accomplished he practically bore a charmed life.

It was this unfaltering faith and unswerving resolution that throughout his life enabled him to sway other men, and carry his point against obstacles that seemed insuperable.

Denis had come completely under the spell of his strong, noble character, and was as ready to do his bidding as Koyee was to obey him.

Piling on the dry branches until the flames leaped high into the air, they awaited the approach of the wolves.

Nearer and nearer came the howling, seeming to grow fiercer as its distance lessened, and presently the gaunt grey forms became visible on the white snow, and the cruel gleaming eyes flashed in the fire-light.

‘Take good aim, and do not fire in a hurry, Denis,’ said the lieutenant, putting his gun to his shoulder. ‘Aim right between the eyes. Now.’

They fired at the same moment, and both bullets went true to their mark, the smitten wolves rolling over on the snow with horrid snarling and snapping, that death soon silenced. The others made a dash forward, as though to avenge their fallen companions, but Lieut. Franklin and Denis, seizing burning brands,

hurled them on their foes, who tumbled over one another in their hasty retreat.

The guns were reloaded, and once more discharged with as good result as before, and again the wolves charged, only to be again driven back.

This time they bethought themselves of their dead brethren; and suspending for the moment their designs upon the man and boy who could not escape them, anyway, they fell greedily upon the bodies of the killed.

As they bit and tore and snarled and snapped, both the sight and sound were repulsive in the extreme degree, and Lieut. Franklin was wellnigh sickened by it.

‘The abominable brutes!’ he exclaimed, in strong disgust. ‘They feast upon one another as readily as if it was moose-meat they were eating. What sweet morsels we’d make for them, if they could only get their teeth into us!’

‘Yes, indeed, sir,’ answered Denis; ‘but’—and here he aimed carefully into the huddle of grey forms, and fired, with the result of furnishing another item to the hideous banquet—‘they will not have that pleasure to-night.’

The hours dragged wearily by, as the beleaguered pair kept watch and ward by the fire, which was their chief protection. In truth, but for the leaping, crackling flames they would have fallen victims to the wolves in a short time.

As it was, there were moments when it seemed as if the maddened creatures would not be balked of their prey, even by the fire, and rushed forward so furiously that only the most frantic shoutings and brandishing of burning brands sufficed to keep them off.

But at last the eagerly longed-for dawn began to appear. The blackness left the sky, giving way to welcome grey, the stars vanished, and with them the wolves, who slunk off to their fastnesses, leaving ten of their number upon the snow, the most of them in a half-eaten state.

‘Thank God!’ exclaimed Lieut. Franklin. ‘We’ll have no more trouble from those brutes, and we’ve not lost a pound of the meat. I think we may well feel proud of ourselves, Denis.’

‘We killed them fine, eh?’ responded Denis, as he kicked contemptuously the torn carcase of a huge grey fellow, ‘and Pierre had nothing to do with it—only you and me.’

It was evidently a great satisfaction to the boy that Pierre could claim no part in the victory over the wolves. He was frankly jealous of the *voyageur*, as indeed he was of everybody in whom the lieutenant showed interest, and it rejoiced him that no share of the glory could fall to his rival.

Not long after sunrise Pierre came, accompanied by three other men, drawing toboggans, upon which the meat would be packed for transportation to the fort.

They were considerably surprised at seeing the dead wolves, and Pierre was prompt to congratulate Lieut. Franklin upon having defended himself and the moose-meat to such good purpose; but he took care to say nothing that Denis could lay hold of as intended for himself.

The other men, however, said some kind things to the boy, with which he was satisfied.

Without loss of time the toboggans were loaded, and the return to Cumberland House accomplished.

Here the successful hunters had a rousing reception,

and the account of their thrilling experience was received with great interest.

‘The wolves are particularly fierce and daring this winter,’ said the governor of the Post to Lieut. Franklin, ‘and you did remarkably well to keep them off. I am glad I was not in your place, for I fear I would not have come out of it as well as you did.’

‘Oh, it was Denis that pulled me through,’ answered the lieutenant smilingly. ‘But for him I should have given up, and let the brutes have their own way with me.’

Denis laughed, and clapped his hands for joy. In his own heart he did think he had acquitted himself quite brilliantly, and it was intensely gratifying to have his chief speak thus before the people of the Post. It would not fail to give them a good opinion of him. On comparing results with the other parties that had gone out after moose, it was found that none had done better than Lieut. Franklin, although one or two had been equally successful.

The weather now grew rapidly colder, until the thermometer went down below zero, and stayed there.

All the streams and lakes were covered with thick ice, the snow fell in great quantities, and the residents of the fort were for the most part shut up within doors, as there was little or nothing to do outside. Lieut. Franklin put this enforced idleness to good use by giving Denis lessons in reading and writing.

The young fellow was eager to learn, as he quite understood the advantage such accomplishments would give him over other employés seeking advancement in the Company’s service, and he proved a very diligent pupil.

He wanted to understand everything too, and fairly peppered his kind teacher with questions, some of which were exceedingly amusing, framed as they were in his French-Canadian speech, that often failed to clearly express just what he meant.

Thus the days went, and the end of the year approached.

Lieut. Franklin was resolved that Christmas should be celebrated in fitting fashion, so far as the resources of the establishment permitted, and, with the hearty co-operation of his brother officers, he set about preparing a programme for the day.

Of course there could be no hanging up of stockings, but he was determined upon a Christmas-tree, and more besides.

He made no secret of his beneficent plans, and not only the employés of the Company, but the half-breeds and Indians who had their homes in the neighbourhood of the fort, were all agog with expectation.

When at last the day came, the excitement had reached an unwonted pitch, and Lieut. Franklin began to be apprehensive lest he had undertaken too much, and the result might be more disappointment than pleasure.

‘They are all looking for great things, Denis,’ he said, ‘and yet there is so little to work with. I do hope they’ll be content with what I have arranged.’

The first thing in the morning was to fire off a *feu de joie* in honour of the day. Everybody who had a gun was summoned to the front of the fort, and having been ranged in line by the lieutenant, three rattling volleys were let off for the benefit of an admiring crowd of women and children.

After this the whole company was invited into the big dining-room of the Post, where they were served with tea, which was a great treat; and then, having disposed themselves about the room as best they could, the most of them squatting upon the floor, a religious service was conducted by Lieut. Franklin, assisted by his brother officers.

The beautiful hymn, 'Hark, the herald angels sing,' was rendered very well indeed by the quartette of Englishmen, and so keenly enjoyed by the oddly assorted congregation of whites, half-breeds, and pure-blood Indians, that the singers were fain to repeat it throughout, and sing some other hymns, in order to satisfy their importunate audience.

Dr. Richardson then read the Gospel story of the Advent, and all who knew it recited the Lord's Prayer in unison, after which Lieut. Franklin gave a brief address upon the true meaning of Christmas, and the inestimable benefits flowing from the coming of Christ to the world.

He spoke with great simplicity and force, and was listened to with profound attention. Even those who could not follow his words were fascinated by his earnest manner and the benignant warmth of his tone.

Denis, usually as restless as a squirrel, sat like a statue. The lieutenant's story interested him deeply, and he determined to learn more about this wonderful Jesus, who had such love for everybody.

When the service had ended, the congregation was dismissed, and all went out into the open air, where the men and boys skylarked about, while the women were preparing the midday meal.

For the afternoon there had been arranged a

programme of sports that was awaited with great expectation.

First came a shooting match, the target being a large wooden one prepared for the occasion.

In this competition the Company's men and the half-breeds easily did better than the members of Lieut. Franklin's party, Denis being the only one to make a good show, and he having to acknowledge defeat, although he did his very best.

The prizes were packages of tobacco, donated by Governor Williams, and highly appreciated by their winners.

Then came some short snow-races for the girls and boys that excited great amusement, being keenly contested in every case. The prizes for these were packages of sugar, which the women and children hanker for as strongly as the men do for their tobacco.

These preliminaries being disposed of, the chief events on the programme followed—the dog-sledge race and the long-distance snow-shoe races for the men.

The sledge race was between the best dog-teams from the two rival establishments, the North-Westerns having been cordially invited to share in the festivities, and having readily accepted.

As four teams were entered, it was decided to have the race in heats, and amid intense excitement the first pair ranged up for the start.

The course lay on the frozen bosom of the lake, and was as good as could be wished. It was a mile in length, with one turn, and in full view from the fort throughout.

The dogs, catching the spirit of the occasion, were

so eager to be off that there was no small difficulty in securing a fair start; but at last they were got away upon even terms, amid an ear-splitting chorus of cries and shouts.

Pierre Grosbois was the driver of the Hudson Bay sledge, and he had put his little boy in the seat to steady it.

The driver of the North-West sledge was a pure Indian, a stalwart Cree, who evidently entertained the highest opinion of his own skill.

Little as Denis loved Pierre, his sympathies were now entirely with him, for two reasons—first, because he represented the Company; and secondly, because his opponent was an Indian; and Denis wanted the Indian to be soundly beaten.

The contest proved a very close and exciting one, but after a grand struggle Pierre won, and the hearts of the Hudson Bays were uplifted.

The second was captured by the North-Westerns, thus making the honours even, and intensifying the excitement for the final heat, which was to be between the winners of the first two.

While the dogs were resting, some short snow-shoe races were run off; and then, as the spectators clustered close around the starting-point, the two rival dog-teams were made ready for the decisive trial.

Pierre evidently felt the responsibility resting upon him to be a very heavy one, and seemed in no hurry to start.

His boy, taking it for granted that he would again occupy the sledge, took his seat thereon, but had hardly done so when Pierre, catching him by the neck, lifted him out roughly, saying—

‘No—you no good—you get out.’ And while the

disappointed youngster set up a howl, Pierre looked around until his eye rested upon Denis.

‘Come,’ said he, beckoning vigorously with his crooked fingers. ‘You’ll be better; you know how to ride.’

Denis could hardly believe his ears. There was nothing in the world he would have liked better at that moment than to be in the sledge, but nothing at the same time that seemed less likely, in view of the relation between Pierre and himself.

But he did not delay to ask questions.

‘Good!’ he exclaimed gladly. ‘I’ll come;’ and, springing forward, he seated himself on the sledge.

‘Are you all ready now?’ asked Lieut. Franklin, who was starter, and judge at the finish.

The drivers nodded assent, and the word ‘Go!’ being given, the dogs bounded off at great speed.

The North-West driver was a French-Canadian who was reputed to be one of the best managers of dog-teams in that Company’s service; and Mr. Connolly, his chief, had promised him a pound of tobacco and other treasure if he won, so that he was bound to do his very best, if only for selfish considerations.

He had an Indian boy in his sledge, whose tawny face was lit up with delight, and who looked across at Denis in a way that meant, ‘We’ll beat you—see if we don’t.’

On the way out to the turn the two teams kept side by side without either gaining any material advantage.

After the first burst of speed the dogs ran steadily enough; and their drivers, realizing that the issue would be decided in the home stretch, did not press them, but just kept them at their work by encouraging

cries, and by letting the long whip crack over their backs.

Denis sat still and said nothing. He knew that was just what Pierre wanted. But his heart was beating furiously, and he would have dearly liked to give the Indian boy a good clout over the head for looking so confident of victory.

On over the hard snow the sledges went, first one gaining a slight advantage, and then the other, only to lose it again shortly.

‘The turn, Pierre, the turn!’ exclaimed Denis, speaking for the first time, as they drew near the turning-point. ‘We must turn first, eh?’

‘Yes—yes,’ panted Pierre; and then raising his voice he shouted to his dogs, at the same time letting them feel the whip upon their backs.

They responded with a splendid spurt, which carried them past their rivals, and gave them a clear lead of a length, thus enabling them to make the turn unimpeded by the other sledge.

This manœuvre was so well executed that the North-Wester did not realize the purpose until too late to frustrate it; but the moment he turned the post he laid on the lash, and shouted so furiously to his dogs that they developed a rate of speed they had not hitherto shown, and drew up alongside Denis.

It was a straight run now to the finish, and intense was the excitement of the spectators when they saw the rivals again neck and neck; but a moment later a great groan went up from the Hudson Bays.

Pierre, while using his whip and voice to the utmost, was seen to suddenly fall prostrate, and lie motionless on the snow, leaving his dogs undirected.

What could have happened no one knew, but the race seemed hopelessly lost.

Not so, however. Well was it that Pierre had at the last moment substituted the bright-witted Denis for his own boy; for now Denis showed himself equal to the emergency that had suddenly arisen.

When he fell, the whip had fallen from Pierre's hand, and fortunately landed in the sledge at Denis's feet.

Grasping it at once, the young fellow sprang up, and, steadying himself in the swaying sledge, shouted to the dogs in his own way, while he made the lash bite into their backs.

There had not been time for them to lose much ground, and thus stimulated to fresh exertions the dogs responded remarkably well, so that in another twenty yards they were once more on even terms.

The run-in was exciting beyond description.

Both teams seemed to so thoroughly understand the situation, to realize so clearly what was expected of them, as to render urging on the part of their drivers superfluous, although the North-Wester and Denis worked like wild things.

On came the sledges so close together that a blanket would have covered them both, and it seemed as if the issue must be a dead heat, when just within the last hundred yards the North-Wester's team began to flag, despite the frantic efforts of its driver, while Denis kept on with unslackened speed, reaching the winning-point a full length of the sledge in advance of the other. So gallantly had the race been won that even the North-Westers joined in the tumultuous cheering, and Denis was wrung by the hand, and clapped on the back until he was sore, by the men from both establishments.

Poor Pierre was for the moment quite forgotten ; but when the *furor* over Denis's victory had subsided, Lieut. Franklin asked that somebody should go out to see what had happened to him.

They found him still lying on the snow, having fallen in a sort of fit, to which he was at times subject, and he had to be carried back to the fort, where he presently recovered all right.

Denis's promptness in taking his place at the critical moment was warmly praised, and Lieut. Franklin added of his own accord to the prize list a bright silk handkerchief, which delighted Denis hugely.

When Governor Williams offered the package of tobacco and other gifts which were for the winner of the sledge race, the lad laughed, and put his hands behind his back.

'Those not for me,' he said. 'Those for Pierre.'

'Oh no !' responded the governor. 'They're yours. You won them, didn't you ?'

'No,' answered Denis, still withholding his hands ; 'Pierre won them. Me—I just help him.'

'Upon my word, you're very magnanimous !' exclaimed the governor, while Lieut. Franklin gave Denis a glance of warm approval. 'But it shall be as you say. The stuff is more suitable for Pierre than for you, anyway.'

And so Pierre, much to his surprise, after all obtained what he so dearly coveted.

The programme of races being ended, the gathering broke up for supper, and, that meal having been disposed of, reassembled at Cumberland House, where the great event of the day was still to come—namely, the Christmas-tree.

CHAPTER VIII

OFF TO FORT CHIPEWYAN

AS there had never been a Christmas-tree at Cumberland House within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, only those who came from the old land knew what to expect. The rest of the folk just took it for granted that there was something very novel and delightful to be seen, and crowded about the door of the room in high spirits.

Lieut. Franklin had persuaded Governor Williams to invite the North-Westerners to be present, and some half-dozen had come over, prepared to be as agreeable as possible. At the appointed time the door was thrown open, and the laughing, chattering crowd jostled merrily into the room. The moment their eyes fell upon the tree, the chamber rang with exclamations of delight.

‘Oh, but it is fine!’ ‘It is pretty!’ ‘It is splendid!’ and so on in swelling chorus, each one endeavouring to outdo the other in appreciative emphasis.

Only Lieut. Franklin and his brother officers had been in the secret. The enterprise was entirely theirs, and they certainly had good reason to be proud of their handiwork, and to be satisfied with the sensation it made. They had taken a small spruce-

tree with thick, strong branches, and decorated it so far as the resources of their own possessions and those of the establishment permitted, lighting it with little candles especially prepared.

Suspended from the branches, or ranged about the foot of the tree, were such gifts as they were able to compass—packages of tea for the women, and of tobacco for the men, and brightly coloured handkerchiefs for the boys and girls, and for the little children small parcels of sugar-candy, compounded by Dr. Richardson, who had great culinary skill. Of course only the employés and their families were included in this distribution ; none of the officials participated. They merely had the pleasure of looking on at the unrestrained delight of the recipients.

Denis, however, was not forgotten. For him there was a long, thick, scarlet sash, that pleased him immensely, and which he at once proceeded to tie about his waist, looking as proud as a peacock with expanded tail.

It was altogether a very joyous scene, and when the parcels had all been distributed, and the excitement had somewhat abated, Lieut. Franklin called upon Denis for some music.

He was only too glad to comply, and as the merry piping of his piccolo filled the room, it soon inspired a tapping of feet and patting of hands that showed how eager the folks were for a dance.

The governor having no objections, the place was soon cleared, and one of the Scotch employés, getting out his fiddle, the liveliest kind of dancing followed, the half-breed women being in great request as partners, and proving themselves agile and graceful trippers on the light fantastic toe.

It was full midnight ere Governor Williams gave the word for the festivities to come to an end; and then the company dispersed with many expressions of gratitude to their genial hosts, vowing that they had never had such a happy day before.

Denis was delighted beyond measure with Christmas. He thought it was a splendid institution, and made Lieut. Franklin tell him all about the way it was celebrated in England.

'I wish I was English,' he said, with a note of profound longing in his voice. 'It is fine to be English—but me, I am only Metis;' and the tears filled his dark eyes, for it was evident the Indian blood in him was a sore grief to him.

'You cannot be English, Denis,' answered Lieut. Franklin, soothingly; 'but you may go to England some day, if you live.' Indeed, perhaps I may take you there myself.'

Instantly the tears vanished, and in their place was a brilliant look of joy.

'Oh, will you do that, sir? Will you?' exclaimed the boy, clasping the lieutenant's hand. 'You are so good!'

'Well, I won't absolutely bind myself, Denis,' said Lieut. Franklin; 'many things may happen to make it impossible, and I dare say it was foolish of me to say anything about it, so don't set your heart too strongly upon it, my lad. We'll see how matters stand when the time comes.'

Denis prudently said nothing more, but the half-promise made a deep impression on him, and the thought of it often served as a restraint upon him when the mischievous side of his character was tempted to assert itself.

Comfortable as it was at Cumberland House, Lieut. Franklin had no idea of remaining there all the winter. After thoroughly talking over matters with both the Hudson Bay and North-West Fur Company's officials, he was persuaded of the necessity of proceeding ere spring into the Athabasca district, the residents of which were best acquainted with the nature and resources of the country lying north of the Great Slave Lake, whence only the guides, hunters, and interpreters essential for the journey to the shores of the Arctic seas could be obtained. He therefore decided to divide his party, leaving Dr. Richardson and Mr. Hood at Cumberland House, while Mr. Back and Denis would accompany him on the tedious midwinter journey.

On January 18 the start was made, many of the residents of the Post accompanying the travellers part of the way, so as to give them a good send-off.

Lieut. Franklin's party comprised, beside himself and Denis, the midshipman, Mr. Back, and a seaman named John Hepburn, a brave, faithful fellow, who rendered great service throughout the whole course of the expedition.

They had two carioles for riding in, and two sledges for carrying their stores, the latter being simply large, strong toboggans, upon which the packages were firmly lashed.

Three dogs constituted a team, and there was a driver for each team, the whole party thus consisting of eight persons, for whom fifteen days' provisions were carried.

In their company went also Mr. McKenzie, of the Hudson Bay Company, who was bound to Isle à la Crosse with four sledges under his charge, so that

they made up quite a procession, following in Indian file on the track of the man who broke the way for the foremost dog-team.

Everybody was, of course, on snow-shoes, and Denis, to whom this mode of winter travel was second nature, took quite a paternal interest in the three Englishmen, who were to have their first experience of continuous tramping upon these wonderful products of Indian ingenuity.

Setting out soon after sunrise, they proceeded along the ice-covered surface of the Saskatchewan River. When the snow is hard set the dog-sledges, even though heavily laden, can make about two and a half miles an hour, and fifteen miles a day is considered good work ; but at this time the snow was very loose and the going heavy, so that not more than six miles were covered ere camping-time came.

The preparation of the camp was a simple business, and soon accomplished. With the snow-shoes the snow was cleared away from a sheltered nook, and then pine-branches were laid down to floor the 'hut,' as the resting-place was termed, although it was open to the air on all sides as well as above.

Not until the sleeping-place had been arranged, and a sufficient supply of fuel for the night gathered, was the fire allowed to be lit ; and then, with appetites sharpened to the keenest edge, the travellers sat down to their supper of scalding tea and roast meat.

The dogs were fed with big chunks of fish, which they bolted in a way strongly suggestive of sudden choking ; but none of them so much as winked, and when they gave up all hope of getting any more, they huddled themselves together in the snow near the fire for their night's rest.

The thermometer was far below zero, and the Englishmen speculated as to how they would fare sleeping in the open air for the first time.

‘Do you think we’ll freeze?’ asked Lieut. Franklin, laughingly, with an exaggerated shudder. ‘If you happen to wake up during the night, would you mind just giving me a poke, to make sure I’m still alive?’

‘Yes, certainly, sir,’ responded Denis, laughing in his turn. ‘But you won’t be cold; on the contrary, you’ll be so warm that you’ll be very sorry when you have to get up to-morrow morning.’

‘I hope so, indeed, Denis,’ returned the lieutenant; ‘for I’m extremely tired, thanks to the snow-shoes, and I do want to have a good night’s rest.’

It turned out just as Denis had prophesied. Once well wrapped up in coat and blanket, with his feet turned towards the big fire that was kept burning all night, the men taking turns at watching it, the lieutenant slept as soundly as if in his own bunk on board ship.

He had not to turn out to tend the fire, of course—there were plenty of others to do that—but just about midnight he was disturbed in rather a startling way.

The sledge dogs were inveterate thieves, and they would eat almost anything that was not wood or metal; consequently it was necessary to put all the provisions out of their reach.

This was generally done by hanging the packages high up on the branches of the trees; but Lieut. Franklin, thinking he could sleep better for having a pillow, put one package under his head, feeling quite sure the dogs would not dare to attack it there.

Such quiet had settled over the camp that even the man in charge of the fire was dozing, when the fore-

goer, that is, the leading dog of the team, a big, shaggy creature, crept silently over to where the lieutenant was sleeping, and, fastening his teeth on the package that was doing duty as a pillow, gave it a hard tug.

This woke the sleeper, who opened his eyes, to find what seemed a big wolf standing over him with evil intent.

He was so tightly muffled in his blanket that he could not spring up at once, but he struck at the animal with his hand, shouting, 'Get out, you brute!'

His exclamation woke Koyee, who was sleeping beside Denis, and in an instant the faithful creature sprang at the marauder, and the two rolled over on top of Lieut. Franklin in furious combat.

This disturbance awoke the whole camp, and the other dogs having dashed forward to see what it was all about, and perhaps join in the *mêlée*, there ensued a scene of great confusion, which was soon, however, straightened out, by the drivers taking their whips and laying about with them liberally until the dogs were driven off, and order restored in a measure.

When Lieut. Franklin realized the actual cause of his midnight scare, he laughed heartily.

'Well, upon my word,' he said. 'It was too absurd altogether. The idea of my being nearly frightened out of my wits by a dog! It has taught me a lesson, however, and that is not to have any provisions near me when I'm sleeping; those dogs are too enterprising altogether.'

Accordingly, he put his pillow up with the other packages, and was not again disturbed during the night.

In the morning, Mr. Back, taking up the thermometer, which had been hung on one of the trees, exclaimed :

‘Just look at this ! It’s a wonder we were not frozen stiff ourselves.’

The mercury had all sunk into the bulb of the instrument, and there frozen as hard as if it had been water.

When held to the fire it melted and rose again in the tube, but quickly redescended on being exposed to the cold, and the thermometer was of no further use, so that they could not ascertain the temperature during the rest of the journey.

It was hard and heavy travelling through the deep snow for several days, and the Englishmen suffered sorely from *mal de raquette*, as the *voyageurs* call it, the feet becoming galled from the snow-shoes and extremely sore, while the muscles of the calves of the legs took painful cramps that made every step an agony.

But the other members of the party, except Denis, who sympathized deeply with the sufferers, showed no pity upon them, pushing ahead as fast as the dogs could draw the sledges ; and Lieut. Franklin and Mr. Back were fain to take frequent rides in the carioles, in order to get temporary relief from their misery.

Many tracks of moose, red-deer, wolves, and foxes were seen, but none of the animals themselves, until they reached a place where high cliffs bordered the river, and where they witnessed a sight so extraordinary that the Englishmen were spellbound, and vowed they would never have believed it, had they not seen it with their own eyes.

Their attention was first attracted by the howling and barking of wolves in a way that showed they were carrying out some purpose, and not making the racket for mere amusement.

Presently, to the edge of the cliff came a small herd of red-deer, who were evidently exhausted from a long run through the heavy snow.

Making a last stand on the very brink, they faced their remorseless foes, and strove to beat them back with their antlers.

‘Look! look!’ cried Denis, quivering with excitement. ‘They want to make them jump, and then the deer fall down on the rocks and kill themselves, and the wolves come eat them.’

That was manifestly the design of the sagacious brutes, and they would be well rewarded for their pains, as the herd comprised two fine bucks and twice as many does, and would make an ample dinner for the entire pack, however voracious.

‘Come, let us wait,’ Denis continued. ‘We’ll soon have plenty good meat, and the wolves, they get nothing. Eh! won’t that be a joke?’

Lieut. Franklin was keenly interested. He had heard of this manœuvre of the wolves, but had hitherto thought it a mere hunter’s yarn, and now it was to be enacted before his eyes.

There was no need to interfere. The wolves would do the business thoroughly themselves without any assistance; and although the dogs, led by Koyee, set up a chorus of excited barking, the party gave no other sign of their presence.

Presently the wolves drew back, and then charged in a body upon the deer so furiously that the latter, in a paroxysm of terror, turned tail and sprang over the cliff.

'The poor creatures!' exclaimed Lieut. Franklin, in a tone of profound sympathy. 'It was a cruel alternative.'

Down through the air the deer dropped, keeping their balance in some wonderful way, so that they struck full upon their feet not a hundred yards from where the men and sledges were drawn up, awaiting the issue of this thrilling scene.

So great was the descent, and so pitiless the rocks at the foot of the cliff, that it seemed impossible any animal could fall upon them without being dashed to death; yet, strange to say, the deer did not all meet that fate.

Three of them, indeed, were so badly injured that they lay where they fell, being powerless to move; but the three others, a buck and two does, happening to light on deep snow-drifts, after being still a few moments till they regained their wind, began to struggle out of the snow in which they were imbedded.

'Let us shoot them—we need the meat,' called out Lieut. Franklin; and the guns being ready, a volley was fired, which brought down all three.

Just at this moment the pack of wolves, which had descended by another way, came into view, and for the first time discovered the presence of the party of men.

Ravenous as they were, the sight made them pause. Here was an interruption upon which they had not reckoned, and after their first surprise they seemed prepared to show fight.

They had won their dinner fairly after their own fashion; were they now to be deprived of it, at the very moment when it was all ready?

‘Kill them! kill them!’ cried Denis, who had a specially keen hatred for the creatures, and would have been glad to put a couple of them to death every day of his life, if he could get the chance. With utmost haste the guns were reloaded, and then in a body the men advanced to the attack, Koyee going ahead and barking as fiercely as though he were ready to attack the wolves single-handed.

The gaunt grey brutes stood their ground resolutely, and looked very dangerous as, with gleaming teeth and horrid snarling, they ranged in a sort of half-circle, facing their assailants.

‘Don’t fire until I give you the word,’ said the lieutenant. ‘Each man make sure of his mark.’

They advanced steadily until not more than twenty yards separated the pack and the party. Then Lieut. Franklin gave the command to fire.

The volley rang out like the report of a single gun, and over on the blood-stained snow rolled four of the wolves, while two others limped away with broken legs.

Eager to complete the work of destruction, Denis dashed recklessly after one of the wounded wolves, clubbing his gun to beat his brains out.

The creature, unable to get away, turned and faced him, growling horribly.

Lieut. Franklin, thinking the boy over-rash, called out to him: ‘Stop, Denis! Don’t do that!’

But Denis was too much excited to heed. Swinging his gun over his head, he aimed a tremendous blow at the wolf, which assuredly would have finished him had it taken effect; but the brute cleverly dodged it, and before Denis could recover himself sprang at him, bearing him to the ground.

Had the young fellow been alone, it certainly would have gone hard with him, for, although badly wounded, the wolf had sufficient strength left to do plenty of harm; but happily one of the *voyageurs* was close behind Denis, and as soon as he fell, he rushed forward and buried his hatchet in the wolf's head.

Released from his danger, Denis rose to his feet, feeling his shoulder where the wolf's teeth had gripped him.

'Are you badly hurt?' asked Lieut. Franklin solicitously. 'Let me see.'

On examination it was found that the terrible teeth had not penetrated the clothing, but had left bruises which were sufficiently painful to teach Denis to be more cautious in future.

Thoroughly routed by this time, the remainder of the wolves vanished whence they had come, leaving the men in undisturbed possession of the venison, which was most welcome.

Having had nothing better than dried meat and pemmican for some time past, it was decided to halt for the remainder of the day, and allow the whole party, including the dogs, to have a good feast upon the juicy, savoury meat.

So the sledges were brought up, big fires were built, and the *voyageurs* set to work to skin and cut up the deer.

Everybody had roast venison to his heart's content, the dogs were allowed to fill themselves to repletion, and then all took a good rest, not resuming their journey until the following morning, when, thoroughly refreshed, they set out with increased vigour.

By pushing forward steadily all day, they were able to reach the deserted post at the Upper Nippen at nightfall; and here Lieut. Franklin and Mr. Back were able to perform the operations of washing and shaving, which they had not been able to do since leaving Cumberland House, owing to the severity of the weather.

‘Now, Denis,’ said the lieutenant, after he had concluded the business to his own great comfort, ‘I feel more like a Christian than I have for some days past.’

Denis smiled as he replied—

‘You look fine, to be sure; but it is a great trouble, certainly.’ For his part he could not see the point of taking so much pains to have a clean face. It was much more comfortable just to go on without bothering about it.

For several days following the cold continued very severe, and when facing the wind it was necessary to keep constantly rubbing the exposed portions of the face to prevent their being frozen, and in spite of every precaution some of the men were badly frost-bitten.

One night the cold was so intense that the tea froze in the tin pots before the men could drink it, and even a mixture of spirits and water congealed in the mug. To add to the dreariness and discomfort of the situation, the wolves gathered about the encampment in great numbers, and howled in horrid chorus all night long, so that it was impossible for the weary men to get their full share of sleep.

CHAPTER IX

A SUCCESSFUL BUFFALO HUNT

BY steady marching day after day across open plains, where the biting wind smote their faces with cruel keenness, and through dense woods of pine and fir, the travellers made good progress until they came to the beginning of the barren ground.

These were vast expanses of country utterly bare of wood, and affording fine pasturage for the buffalo.

By this time the stock of provisions had got so low that there was only a mere morsel apiece for the men, and nothing for the dogs save scraps of burned leather.

‘We must soon find food of some sort,’ said Lieut. Franklin, who was much concerned at the condition of things, ‘or it will go hard with us. How far is it yet to Fort Carlton, Jean Baptiste?’ he asked of one of the *voyageurs* who was familiar with the route.

‘One—two—three days,’ replied the *voyageur*, ticking it off on his fingers.

‘Three days!’ exclaimed the lieutenant. ‘I was hoping we could get there in two at the most. I think we had better camp here, where we can still get some wood, and try for a buffalo before going any farther.’

This counsel seemed good to the others, and so they went into camp in a bunch of pine that bordered the barren grounds.

They had little else than a cup of scalding tea for supper that night, and all looked forward anxiously to the morrow, and hoped that it would bring them a fine, fat buffalo.

At daybreak everybody was awake, being too hungry to sleep later, and every heart thrilled with joy when Jean Baptiste, who had gone out upon the plain, came back with the good news that he had seen a herd of buffalo about a mile away.

Realizing the supreme importance of the most careful measures, Lieut. Franklin called the men together and organized the plan of campaign.

Jean Baptiste had reported that the buffalo were grazing quietly in a kind of hollow, where the snow no doubt happened to be light, and they could easily paw it away, so as to get at the grass underneath.

‘Now, my men,’ said the lieutenant, ‘we must do our best to surround them, for if we all approach from the same side they will be frightened, and make off before we can get a good shot at them.’

It was accordingly arranged that the *voyageurs* should divide into two parties, and, going to the right and left of the herd, should keep themselves unseen by the buffalo until they had got well beyond them.

Then, closing up their line, they should alarm the animals, and thus drive them in the direction of the camp, where the Englishmen and Denis would be ready to give them a warm reception.

‘Above all things, don’t let the buffalo see you until you’re past them,’ enjoined Lieut. Franklin,

earnestly. 'It will be dreadful if we fail to secure at least one.'

Promising to take every precaution, the *voyageurs* set out, while those who remained behind watched them breathlessly.

Denis would have liked to go out with the *voyageurs*, but Lieut. Franklin said 'No,' as he wanted him at hand, for he was really the best shot of his party.

The stalkers moved rapidly over the snow, growing smaller and smaller as the distance increased, until they looked like mere dots of black on the boundless white.

'They're closing up. They've got beyond the buffalo,' exclaimed Lieut. Franklin, presently. 'Hurrah! that's the first thing done all right.'

The two little groups of dots could be made out drawing closer together until they formed a single line, and then turned towards the camp.

A few minutes later the report of their guns came faintly to the impatient watchers, and almost immediately the buffalo appeared, dashing out of the hollow in which they had been grazing unconscious of danger, and heading straight in the direction of the camp.

'Heaven be thanked!' exclaimed the lieutenant, fervently. 'They could not have done it better. We can't fail of success now.'

Denis was in a fever of excitement. He wanted to rush forward to meet the oncoming animals, but Lieut. Franklin restrained him, saying—

'Don't move until I tell you. The buffalo are heading straight towards us, and if they don't see us they'll come right into our hands.'

So swiftly were the great creatures moving that they had left the *voyageurs* far in the rear; and if it had entered into their dull brains to turn off either to the right or left, there would have been nothing to prevent them.

But, happily, having been once started in the direction of the camp, and thoroughly panic-stricken, they thought of nothing save keeping on at the top of their speed until out of danger, and of breath too.

In a few minutes they were within range of the guns, and the waiting hunters made ready to fire.

The herd comprised twelve in all—one big old bull not worth killing, several younger ones, and half a dozen cows in fair condition.

‘Fire at the cows. Let the others go!’ called out Lieut. Franklin. ‘But wait until the dogs stop them.’

The sledge dogs had been unharnessed and held ready for the moment; but now they were unleashed, and, led by Koyee, darted forward, barking fiercely.

Their sudden appearance had the precise effect upon the buffalo that Lieut. Franklin calculated, for the animals stopped in their tumultuous flight, and quickly gathered into a circular bunch with their heads pointing outward.

They evidently took the dogs for wolves, and prepared to defend themselves in their usual way.

‘Now!’ commanded Lieut. Franklin. ‘Aim carefully before you draw the trigger.’

All running forward at the same time, got close enough to the affrighted herd to almost touch them with the muzzles of their guns ere they fired, and the result of the volley was to bring down two of the cows, and to mortally wound two others.

Ere the hunters had time to reload, however, the uninjured buffalo—their fear of the dogs being forgotten in their greater alarm at the discharge of the guns—broke away, and set off over the snow at a lumbering gallop that quickly bore them out of danger.

But they did not all take refuge in flight. Denis's heart had been set on the big bull, and, in spite of Lieut. Franklin's orders to fire only at the cows, he had chosen him out for his mark. In the hurry and confusion he had not aimed so well as usual, and, although he severely wounded the huge animal, he came short of giving him a fatal shot. Yet it sufficed to change his panic terror into fury, and to cause him to turn upon his assailants with intent to kill them if he could.

Oddly enough, Koyee had also singled out this bull for his special attention, and kept barking in front of him and springing at his muzzle.

The other members of the party being engaged in looking after their victims, Denis was left to have it out alone with the bull, which suited him very well, as he was anxious to have the whole glory of his overthrow.

Presently Koyee, darting forward too rashly, was caught by the strong, short horns and tossed high into the air, falling hard some yards away, and limping off apparently much hurt, and certainly quite cured of any desire for further hostilities.

This treatment of his pet angered Denis out of all prudence, and having by this time succeeded in reloading, he aimed full at the bull's head and fired.

His aim was good enough, but the spot was not well chosen, for the bullet simply flattened out upon

the mass of hard bone at the base of the horns, doing no more damage than to stun the big fellow for a moment.

Yet Denis thought him finished, and, full of pride at his success, had turned around to shout to Lieut. Franklin exultantly, 'He's dead! I've done for him—look!' when the bull, regaining his senses, plunged forward, and took him full upon his horns, tossing him up on his hump, where he clung terror-stricken, while the infuriated creature he was bestriding started off to attack Mr. Back, who was the nearest to him of the others.

The midshipman, who had his attention engaged in another direction, did not observe the charge of the bull until Denis, having regained his breath and his self-possession, yelled out to him—

'Take care! take care! the buffalo comes!' and Mr. Back turned round just in time to evade the animal's onset, and, his gun having been reloaded, gave him the benefit of its contents as he blundered past him, meantime calling to Denis:

'Let go there, Denis! Drop off behind!'

But Denis had already recovered himself sufficiently to appreciate the uniqueness of his situation, and his passion for prominence was too strong for his common sense. Being now well set in the saddle, so to speak, he was determined to keep his place, if possible, until his strange steed fell dead in his tracks.

Shouting exultantly, he dug his heels into the bull, and seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly, when the bewildered brute tripped upon a hidden stone and fell heavily, pitching him off in front of him, where he landed upon the broad of his back.

Now was the reckless boy in greater peril than he

had been at any time previous, and had the buffalo not been so weakened by his wounds that he could scarcely struggle to his feet again, it certainly would have gone hard with him, as the shock of the fall made him helpless for a moment.

But the buffalo was incapable of doing further harm. His life was fast ebbing away, and, after a vain effort to regain his feet, he rolled over dead beyond all peradventure.

At this moment Lieut. Franklin came up, and being thoroughly provoked with Denis for the rashness which might easily have cost him his life, seized him by the collar and gave him a good shaking.

'If I had you on board ship, I believe I'd give you masthead duty for a week, with short rations,' he said, in a tone of indignant reproof, such as Denis had never heard from him before. 'I told you to leave that useless old bull alone, and yet you persisted in shooting it, and you came within an ace of being killed yourself, through your crazy antics.'

Denis hung his head and made no reply. Now that the excitement was all over, he began to feel that he had been playing the part of the fool rather than of the hero, and the unwonted warmth of his chief's words went to his heart.

'I am sorry. I do beg pardon,' he said, quite humbly. 'I will not do it again.'

'I should hope not,' laughed Lieut. Franklin, his warmth abating at once. 'Once in a lifetime ought to be enough for anybody. Very well, then, I'll say no more. Come now, let us look after our meat. We've got a fine supply, thank Heaven!'

They had a fine supply indeed, for, not counting the bull, which was not worth cutting up, they had

secured four buffaloes; and the others of their party having by this time rejoined them, they all set merrily to work upon their prizes.

There was, of course, another feast that day, and no thought of advancing until the next morning, when, with ample food to last them for another week, they continued their journey.

Two days' steady marching brought them to Fort Carlton, where Lieut. Franklin, who found the continuous snow-shoe work very hard upon himself and his brother Englishmen, determined to rest until his sore ankles were thoroughly recovered.

They had a warm reception from Mr. Prudens, who was in charge of the Post, and the Englishmen were able, for the first time in two weeks, to have a complete change of clothing, a luxury that they appreciated as could only those who had been in similar circumstances.

Carlton House had a pleasant situation near the bank of the Saskatchewan River, and was chiefly important as a provision post, the land in the vicinity being very fertile, and yielding ample crops of wheat, barley, oats, and potatoes, while just beyond the steep bank, behind the fort, began the vast plain that stretched away to the foot-hills of the Rockies, and was the pasture-ground of buffalo, red-deer, and antelope innumerable.

'I would like very much to see this place in mid-summer,' said Lieut. Franklin. 'It must be quite pretty about here.'

'We'll be very glad to have you stay,' answered the factor of the Post cordially. 'This is a pretty part of the country, and I think myself quite fortunate in having this appointment.'

‘Thank you kindly for your proffered hospitality,’ responded the lieutenant, ‘but by midsummer I hope to be at Fort Chipewyan at least, and possibly farther. I trust, however, to meet you again on my way back.’

It being advisable to remain for several days, so as to thoroughly rest the dogs and allow the Englishmen’s swollen ankles to regain their normal condition, Lieut. Franklin took the opportunity of studying the Indians who had encampments in the neighbourhood, and who were known as Stone Indians.

He found them rather prepossessing in appearance, with good, well-proportioned figures, pleasing countenances of a light copper tint, large expressive eyes, white, regular teeth, and a profusion of very black hair hanging over the ears and shading the face. They were neatly and conveniently dressed in shirt and trousers of buckskin, over which they threw a buffalo robe, that they wore with the grace and dignity of a Roman toga.

In their hands they always carried a gun, or a bow and arrow ready to shoot, with a well-filled quiver hanging at the back.

It was their business to furnish meat to the fort, for which they received in exchange tobacco, knives, ammunition, and spirits, also beads and buttons, of which they were very fond, using them for decorative purposes. A successful hunter would adorn his head with buttons in a curious way, having two or three dozens of them hanging on locks of hair at equal distance from each side of his forehead. At the end of these locks would be attached small coral bells, which tinkled at every step of the wearer, so that the Indian brave might be said to illustrate the line of

the old nursery rhyme, 'He shall have music wherever he goes.'

Lieut. Franklin was quite favourably impressed by the appearance of these Indians.

'They're certainly a fine-looking tribe, and far superior to anything I have yet seen. It must be much pleasanter having to deal with them than the poor creatures I saw at Cumberland House and Norway House.'

'That's just where you are mistaken, sir,' responded Mr. Prudens, the factor. 'They're all right so far as looks go, but they're the greatest rascals on this continent. They'll steal anything they can lay their hands upon; and if they can waylay a party, even of those who are accustomed to trade with them, they'll strip them of everything they've got, and perhaps kill them into the bargain. There's not one of them to be trusted any farther than you can see him.'

'Why, you surprise me!' exclaimed the lieutenant. 'If that be so, I should think you'd need to be constantly on your guard in your dealings with them.'

'And so we are,' replied the factor. 'We never go amongst them except in force and fully armed, and we never allow more than half a dozen of them inside the fort at once. Oh, they're a bad lot, I can tell you, and we don't have much rest when there are many of them around.'

Mr. Prudens then proceeded to fortify his statements as to the bad character of the Stone Indians by relating some of his own experiences and what he had learned from others.

They were particularly fond of horses, which they maintained were common property sent by the Creator for the general use of man, and therefore to be taken

whenever come upon, although they admitted the right of the owners to watch and defend their property.

Only two years previously a band of these Indians had the audacity to attempt to steal some horses that were grazing right before the gate of the North-West Company's establishment, La Montée, three miles distant from Fort Carlton.

It happened that there were not many in the fort at the time, but they did their best to prevent the horses being taken, and a lively fight of several hours' duration took place, in which one man was killed on each side. But in the end the Indians carried off the horses.

If they chanced upon a single traveller, or upon a small party that they could overcome, they would strip them of all their garments, especially of those that had buttons, and leave them to continue their journey in that exposed condition.

Should resistance be anticipated, they did not hesitate to murder first, and rob afterwards.

The traders, when they travelled amongst them, never failed to post sentinels, and often practised the stratagem of lighting a fire at sunset, which they left burning, and then after dark moved on to another encampment. Yet these precautions did not always serve to baffle the audacious robbers.

The Stone Indians kept on good terms with their next neighbours, the Crees, but united with them in determined hostility against the nations farther west, called by them Slave Indians—that being a term of reproof applied by the Crees to the tribes they had overcome in war.

Every summer the tribes would go to war, sometimes mustering three or four hundred horsemen on

each side. Their leaders in approaching the foe exercised all the caution and strategy of skilled generals, and as soon as either party considered that it had gained the best ground, the attack would be made with blood-curdling whoops and furious brandishing of weapons.

They advanced at once to close quarters, and as it was a case of strike and spare not, no quarter being asked or given on either side, the slaughter was often very great.

All prisoners were slain on the spot with wanton cruelty, and then the dead were scalped, that 'brave' being deemed to prove himself the greatest warrior who could boast the greatest number of scalps.

'They fasten these horrid trophies of victory to their war dress,' continued Mr. Prudens, making a grimace of repulsion, 'and then blacken their faces and their clothing in token of joy, coming in that disgusting condition to the fort, in front of which they display themselves, dancing and singing until they are exhausted. It is a horrible sight, but we dare not interfere. They are far too strong for us. We exist here only on sufferance, and if we were to incur their enmity they could easily starve us all to death, or burn the fort over our heads, and add our scalps to their hideous collection.'

The hearing of this made Lieut. Franklin and his companions look grave. It would be necessary for them to traverse a good part of the territory of these bloodthirsty, rapacious Redskins, and the prospect was by no means cheerful.

'Do we run any danger of being attacked by them?' the lieutenant asked, with considerable concern manifest in his tone.

‘There’s no saying,’ was the factor’s dubious response. ‘If they understand that you are not traders, and have no goods or spirits with you, they won’t be likely to trouble you. But I’m afraid you’ll just have to take your chances.’

‘Can you not arrange for me to have an audience with the chief of the nearest encampment?’ inquired Lieut. Franklin. ‘I should like to make clear to him my purpose in coming here, and he may give some sort of safe-conduct that will be of service.’


‘Why, certainly, I can do that,’ replied Mr. Prudens. ‘Your idea seems a good one, and I will see about it at once.’

To such good purpose did the factor bestir himself, that on the following morning a party, comprising the Englishmen, Denis, and several of the garrison of the Post—including, of course, Mr. Prudens—set out for the Cree encampment, which was situated about six miles from the fort.

‘I attach a good deal of importance to this interview,’ said Lieut. Franklin, ‘and I sincerely trust that the proceedings will be thoroughly harmonious.’

CHAPTER X

THE VISIT TO THE CREE ENCAMPMENT

HE Cree encampment was not a large one, consisting of only seven tents, of which the most spacious belonged to the chief.

It had been made ready for the visitors by being neatly arranged, the floor covered with fresh grass, and buffalo robes placed on the side opposite the door for the guests to sit upon, while a kettle of meat was already boiling on the fire.

The chief, a fine-looking man quite sixty years of age, welcomed his visitors with a hearty shake of the hand and the customary salutation of 'What cheer!' an expression learned from the traders.

All having been duly introduced by Mr. Prudens, Lieut. Franklin invited the chief and his hunters to smoke the pipe of peace, and this being loudly announced throughout the camp, a dozen men from the other tents immediately joined the party.

On their appearance, the squaws and youngsters, who had been gazing on the strangers with their large dark eyes full of curiosity and interest, silently withdrew, it being contrary to Indian etiquette for them to remain.

Mr. Prudens' clerk having by this time prepared and lighted the calumet, it was presented to the old

chief, who, before he began smoking, pointed the stem to the south, west, north, and east, then to the heavens, the earth, and the fire, as an offering to the presiding spirits. Having done this, he took three good whiffs and passed the pipe to his neighbour, who took the same number and passed it on, and thus it went the rounds.

Some spirits and water were then offered to the old man, who, before he drank, asked for a feather, and sprinkled some drops on the ground, each time pronouncing a prayer to the Keetchee Manitou, or Great Spirit.

The purport of his prayer was that the buffalo might be plentiful, the fur-bearing animals numerous, and that all present might escape the sickness which was so prevalent.

To each petition the Indians assented with a guttural 'Aha,' that evidently was their Amen, and then, the prayer being finished, the chief sipped the spirits, and passed the cup around. After the ceremonies the smoking and conversation became general, and Lieut. Franklin strove to make the best possible impression on the chief.

He was glad to learn that the Crees considered him and Mr. Back to be war chiefs possessing great power, and he took the opportunity of making a little speech, in which he urged the Indians to treat the traders well, not to steal their horses and goods, and to be industrious in supplying them with provisions and furs, assuring them that if he heard of their good behaviour he would not fail to report it to their Great Father across the sea (by which name King George III was designated).

While this was going on four Stone Indians arrived,

and were invited into the tent, but only one accepted the invitation, and Mr. Prudens, observing this, gave instant directions that the horses belonging to the party should be narrowly watched, as he suspected the new-comers of designs upon them.

Just as the lieutenant concluded his address, which was interpreted by one of the employés at the fort, and was listened to with grave approval by the Indians, Denis, who had been exploring the encampment on his own account—for the ceremonies did not interest him—came running up, looking very animated, and taking hold of Lieut. Franklin's hand, said:

'The buffalo pound! Come see it!'

Well pleased by the diversion, for the air of the tent had by this time become insufferably close and oppressive, the lieutenant made his bow, and went out accompanied by his party, leaving the Indians to enjoy their tobacco undisturbed.

Guided by Denis, they went a little distance to the rear of the encampment, and there was the pound, in which many hundreds of buffalo had been entrapped.

It was a circular space about a hundred yards in diameter, strongly fenced in, and having the entrance banked up with snow, so as to prevent the retreat of the animals, once they were driven in.

For about a mile on each side of the road leading to the pound stakes were driven into the ground about twenty yards apart.

These were intended to represent men, and to deter the buffalo from attempting to break away when being driven towards the enclosure.

Within sixty yards or so of the pound the spaces between the stakes were filled up with branches of

trees, behind which the Indians hid until the buffalo came up, when they would suddenly show themselves, and with wild shouts hurry the panic-stricken animals into the fatal enclosure.

All this interested the Englishmen so much that Lieut. Franklin asked the Indians if they could not have a buffalo drive before he left Fort Carlton, whereupon they promptly responded that they could have one the following day, if he wished it.

Much pleased at this, he promised them a pound of tobacco if they made a success of it, and so the matter was arranged for the following morning.

Denis was greatly delighted, a buffalo drive being something entirely to his mind, and he determined that he would have his full share of the fun.

Next morning quite a cavalcade set out from the fort for the Cree camp. Several of the Hudson Bay officials were mounted. Lieut. Franklin was in a horse-carriage, and Mr. Back in one drawn by dogs, while Denis had somehow succeeded in borrowing a shaggy little horse that he bestrode in a reckless style, which suggested the possibility of a tumble or two ere he got back to the post.

‘You look very fine on your spirited steed, Denis,’ said the lieutenant. ‘Do you think you can stay on all right?’

‘To be sure,’ responded Denis, emphatically. ‘I’m good rider, me,’ and clapping his heels against the mustang’s sides he caracoled over the snow in a lively fashion.

On arriving at the camp they found the Indians in readiness, a dozen of them being mounted on quite respectable horses, and armed with guns, or bows and arrows.

The plan of campaign was promptly arranged, and then those on horseback set out to scour the snow-covered plain in search of their quarry, while the others waited in eager expectation.

Denis went off with the mounted Indians. He had never before taken part in a buffalo drive, but he did not see why he could not do his share of the work, and it would be far more fun than waiting for the herd to be driven in.

Out over the white prairie cantered the riders, their keen black eyes glancing eagerly to right and left, in quest of the dark spots on the snow that would mean buffalo.

They had not long to look. A goodly herd was presently sighted in a favourable location, and then came the careful strategy whereby the hunters got beyond them without being discovered, so that the buffalo were put between them and the pound.

In accomplishing this they lay flat on their horses' backs, so that when the buffalo did look up from pawing the snow for the rich grass lying beneath, they saw only some horses in the distance moving on with no apparent purpose.

Denis found this constrained position very tiresome, and once was about to straighten up to ease his back, when an angry exclamation from the Indian next him warned him to keep down. Thus moving as quietly and cautiously as possible, the little band of horsemen accomplished their purpose, and got the herd just where they wanted it.

Then, lining out so as to cover plenty of ground, they rose from their bent positions, and moved down upon the buffalo. The latter instantly took alarm, and after a moment's hesitation, set off in the direc-

tion of the pound, the bulls snorting fiercely, as though in indignant protest against being thus disturbed.

The Indians made no noise, for they did not want the buffalo to become thoroughly frightened before they were well within the roadway to the pound, else they might scatter in all directions over the prairie.

The thing was to keep the herd together until all the men could combine to surround them, and hustle them to their doom.

On came the mob of frightened animals, their speed being retarded by the inability of the calves to keep up with the full-grown ones, and the noble fidelity of their mothers, who would not go on without them.

At last the beginning of the roadway to the pound was reached, and then, the utmost haste being necessary, so that the buffalo would not have time to discover that the black figures standing out of the snow were not really men, but very harmless wooden stakes, the drivers of the herd began shouting, and urging their horses closer to their prey.

Immediately the hitherto rather slow advance of the buffalo changed into a panic-stricken flight, and with heads down and tails tossing they lumbered over the snow, keeping well within the line of the stakes.

All, with one exception. This was a fine young bull that happened to be nearer the stakes than any of the others, and when the noise was set up, instead of hurrying ahead like the rest, he turned suddenly to the right and dashed off across country at a tremendous pace.

There being a full dozen of fine animals in the

herd that was going straight towards the pound, the Indians did not think it worth while to turn off in pursuit of the young bull, but Denis now saw a chance of distinguishing himself. He would look after the independent youngster himself, and so, digging his heels into his pony's sides, he galloped after the fleeing bull.

It chanced that Koyee, who had been held back by Lieut. Franklin, was let loose just at this moment, and his master's cries coming to his ears, he scampered after him, and joined in the pursuit. Away over the snow went the three of them, and it promised to be a lengthy and exciting chase, for the bull was a sturdy young fellow, and not to be easily overcome.

Denis was completely carried away with the excitement of the chase. Up to this time the proceedings had seemed very slow and stupid, but now they were entirely to his liking, and he hoped that he was being watched from the camp while he tore after his quarry.

'This is fine! This is good!' he exclaimed to himself. '*Allons, Koyee! Allons!* We will make him go back, won't we, eh?'

Denis's idea was to outrun the buffalo, and turn him back towards the pound, for he did not have his gun with him, having left it at the camp.

This little scheme, however, the animal seemed to understand, his line of flight being directly away from the pound, and off towards some rough ground to the south.

Nothing daunted, Denis followed him close, waving his arms and shouting at the top of his voice, as his fleet pony bounded over the prairie.

It was such a pretty race that it deserved to have

a goodly crowd of spectators, but the rest of the folks were too much engrossed with the driving of the herd to give any attention to Denis.

Lieut. Franklin alone threw a glance after him, and, seeing what he was about, said :

‘Foolish boy! He’ll never get that buffalo into the pound,’ and then gave his whole attention to the exciting scene before him.

By dint of pressing his pony to the utmost, Denis had succeeded in getting up right alongside the young bull, and was slashing at him with the switch he held in his hand, and which constituted his only weapon, when the pony put his foot into a deep hole in the snow, made by the buffalo when digging down for the grass, and fell violently upon his knees, pitching Denis over his head. It was a very nasty cropper that the boy got, and being utterly unprepared for it, he could do nothing to save himself. He struck the hard frozen snow full with his head and face, the shock depriving him of his senses, while the contact with the rough snow cut his right cheek and forehead so that the blood flowed freely.

Nor did the pony get off any better. His tumble cost him a broken foreleg, rendering him quite helpless, although he strove hard to regain his feet.

In the meantime, the driving of the rest of the herd into the pound had gone on most successfully.

Keeping them well in hand, the mounted Indians presently pressed them on to where the remainder of the party were hidden behind the bushes; and as soon as they reached the place, all those who thus lay in ambush sprang up and fired off their guns, adding to their reports such a wild chorus of yells as would have frightened anything on four legs.

Driven perfectly frantic by this fresh terror, the poor creatures plunged blindly on until they had leaped over the bank of snow that filled the mouth of the pound, and tumbled into the enclosure, that was quickly turned into a slaughter-pen.

It was a famous day's work, a sufficient stock of meat being obtained to supply the Indian camp for a good while to come, and to allow those from the fort to take back with them a generous and welcome addition to their larder.

Not until the buffalo were all killed, and the work of skinning and cutting up had been begun, did Lieut. Franklin bethink himself of Denis. Then, with a start, he exclaimed:

'Why, where's Denis? Hasn't he come back yet?'

There was no answer, because nobody knew anything about the boy; and, beginning to feel anxious, the lieutenant disengaged himself from the throng, and looked about over the prairie in the direction where he had seen Denis some time before.

But not a sign of him, his pony, or dog could he discover; and apprehending some mishap, he called to Mr. Back, saying: 'I'm beginning to feel concerned about Denis. He set off after a buffalo that broke away from the herd, and he's disappeared completely. We must go and look for him.'

Not deeming it wise to go without a guide who knew the country well, Lieut. Franklin asked one of the Indians to accompany them, and the three set out.

Fortunately there was no difficulty in choosing their route, for the Indian soon found the track left by Denis's pony, and followed it up at a rate of

speed that kept the two Englishmen on the run. But they did not begrudge the exertion, for they felt quite anxious about Denis, and were impatient to know what had befallen him.

At last, a full mile from the camp, they came up with him in a hollow of the prairie that hid him from sight until they were almost upon him.

He was still insensible. Indeed, at first sight of his motionless form and blood-stained face, Lieut. Franklin thought him dead, and exclaimed in horror-stricken tones:

‘The poor boy’s killed!’

Not far away lay the pony, exhausted by his futile struggles to rise, while Koyee hovered about his unconscious master in a bewildered way, whining and licking his face and hands, as though to say:

‘Why don’t you get up and speak to me? What is the matter with you?’

Springing from his horse, Lieut. Franklin lifted Denis’s head tenderly and felt for his heart.

‘Thank God!’ he said, looking greatly relieved. ‘He’s just had his senses knocked out of him by the fall. We must get him back to the camp as quickly as possible.’

They accordingly lifted him on to one of the horses, and thus bore him carefully to the encampment.

On the way the motion of the animal revived him, but he did not fully come to himself until he had had the blood washed off and his injuries—which happily proved to be merely of a surface character—attended to, when he was able to give an account of himself.

He felt greatly chagrined at the complete failure of his would-be brilliant performance, and took very

meekly the scolding the lieutenant felt bound to give him.

Everybody but Denis being thoroughly satisfied with the results of the buffalo drive, a great feast was at once held, in which all shared to their hearts' content; and then the visitors returned to the fort, Lieut. Franklin having received from the old chief a mystic emblem in the form of a small 'medicine bag,' which he was assured would serve him as a safe-conduct in his journey across the plains.

On the way back a ludicrous incident occurred that gave them all a hearty laugh.

As already stated, Mr. Back was riding in a dog-sledge, and was enjoying the trip over the smooth hard snow very much, when the 'fore-goer' of his team sighted a buffalo calf that had somehow strayed away from the herd. Instantly he set off in full chase, regardless of the heavy handicap the sledge put upon him, and Mr. Back, much against his will, was dragged along at a reckless pace that threatened to pitch him out every minute.

Yet he could not help sharing in the excitement of the affair, for the calf, like the foolish, clumsy creature that it was, ran very badly, so that the dogs rapidly gained upon it.

The other members of the party halted to see the fun, and had they been in the habit of betting would no doubt have exchanged wagers upon the result.

It was really wonderful with what speed the burdened dogs got over the snow, and yet after their first mad rush they ceased to gain ground at the same rate, and the chances seemed to be turning in favour of the calf, when the sledge struck a ridge of snow, that turned it over on its side, and out

tumbled the midshipman neck and crop, while the spectators laughed long and loud, and the dogs, thus relieved of their encumbrance, dashed on with increased speed, which soon brought them up to the calf.

Lieut. Franklin would not allow the creature to be killed, so the dogs were dragged off, and the homeward journey resumed, Mr. Back receiving the mock sympathies of his companions for the way the dogs had treated him.

Being now thoroughly rested, and having secured a good supply of provisions, Lieut. Franklin resumed his journey on the following morning.

Both the Hudson Bay and North-West establishments joined in fitting him out with means of conveyance, and he had as many carioles and sledges as he wished, so that there would be no necessity of incurring *mal de raquette* for some time to come at any rate.

Soon after starting snow began to fall heavily, making the going heavy, and as the dog sledges carried a load of nearly three hundred pounds each, rapid progress was not possible, so that only ten miles were accomplished by nightfall.

On the following day a large herd of red deer was perceived grazing at a little distance, and although the supply of meat on hand was ample, the *voyageurs* accompanying the expedition could not resist the temptation of endeavouring to secure some venison.

But they only succeeded in wounding one of the fleet, wary animals, and this one managed to get away from them, so that they secured nothing for their pains.

During the afternoon Denis, however, shot a brace

of wood partridges that made a delicious supper for Lieut. Franklin and Mr. Back.

Their route this day lay through a pretty region of alternate hill and dale, with abundant trees. The valleys held small lakes in their embrace, whose snowy covering happily contrasted with the dark green of the surrounding pines.

After ascending a high hill by a winding path through a thick wood, the travellers opened suddenly upon Lake Iroquois, and had a grand view of its picturesque shores. Crossing its white bosom, they encamped on the farther side.

So far they had seen nothing of the Indians, although a sharp look-out had been constantly maintained, and Lieut. Franklin had just made the remark to his associates that it seemed as if they might be fortunate enough not to encounter any of their roving bands, when one of the half-breed hunters came up with a countenance full of concern, and said :

‘Plenty Indians coming! Come, see!’ and leading the lieutenant out to the edge of the trees he pointed down the lake.

Sure enough, advancing along the shore of the lake, appeared a large band of Indians, all mounted, and many of them carrying guns. The dreaded encounter with the Crees was not to be avoided after all!

CHAPTER XI

THE DANCE AT BEAVER RIVER

FOR a moment Lieut. Franklin was undecided as to the right course of action. If he had felt perfect confidence in the safe-conduct obtained from the old chief, he would, of course, have stood ready to receive the approaching Indians as welcome visitors, and to offer them the pipe of peace.

But he had his misgivings as to the efficiency of the emblem, and so, after a brief hesitation, he ordered all his men to arm themselves, and to be prepared to show a stern front to the Crees.

‘See that your guns are loaded with ball, and that your knives and hatchets are at hand,’ he said, in as steady a voice as though he were giving out the orders for the day. ‘I trust there may be no bloodshed, but we must show these fellows that we are quite ready to fight, and then they will be more easily dealt with.’

Denis grasped his gun with a new thrill of excitement, and a strong hope that it might come to fighting, even though their assailants outnumbered them two to one.

Besides his antipathy to the Indians, he was animated by unquestioning faith in Lieut. Franklin being equal to any emergency, and not a qualm of

doubt as to the issue of the conflict, should it take place, disturbed his mind.

'We'll teach those bad men a good lesson,' he said, clinching his teeth, and shaking his head fiercely. 'They be very sorry they come after us.'

'Don't be too sure, my young cock,' responded Hepburn, who had no desire for an interchange of hostilities, and devoutly hoped it would be avoided. 'They're strong enough to wipe us out, if they go the right way about it. You'd better keep your crowing until we're well out of this scrape.'

Coming on steadily until they were within fifty yards of the camp, the Indians then halted, for they found themselves faced by a dozen determined-looking men, who were even better armed than themselves.

They had not expected this, although they had not attempted to conceal their approach, for the traders usually made a show of welcoming them, and rarely offered any resistance.

Lieut. Franklin, being resolved to throw upon the intruders the onus of the first move, whatever it might be, had ordered his men to keep perfect silence, and so they stood like statues, with eyes fixed steadily on the Indians.

This evidently confused the latter. They were at a loss just how to begin proceedings, and the leaders of the band consulted together hurriedly.

Presently three of them moved forward a little in advance of the others, and, with their hands upon their guns, so as to be ready to shoot at the winking of an eyelid, signified their desire for a parley.

Lieut. Franklin then stepped forward with Mr. Back at his right hand, and a *voyageur* who knew the Cree

language on his left. They, too, held their guns ready for instant use.

The parley then proceeded as rapidly as the necessity of every word being changed from Cree into English and from English into Cree permitted.

The Indians expressed surprise at the unfriendly attitude of the expedition, professing that they had no evil designs, but had simply come to ask for some tobacco and spirits, which they claimed ought to be given them for the privilege of passing through their territory.

To this the lieutenant replied that, in view of what had happened in the past, it was necessary to be always on one's guard in passing through this region, and furthermore, that having a safe-conduct from their chief, he did not acknowledge the right of this band to demand tribute, and he refused to pay it.

On hearing this the Indians looked ugly, and an excited conference took place, which resulted in the spokesmen again coming forward, to say that they were not subject to the chief who had given the safe-conduct, and did not recognize it as binding upon them, and that if the white chief would give them what they wanted they would engage to give no further trouble, and furthermore would send two of their own party to accompany the expedition to the next Post, where all danger from marauders would be over.

Being anxious to avoid a collision, and impatient to proceed on his way without being delayed, the lieutenant felt disposed to listen to this, and to grant the request, at least in part.

Before doing so, however, he thought it best to consult with the other members of his party, and

while this consultation was taking place something occurred that came within an ace of putting an end to pacific measures, and bringing about the very conflict he was so desirous of avoiding.

Denis had all along been in a quiver of excitement. So much so, indeed, that one of the Orkney boatmen, noticing the nervous way he was handling his gun, advised him to put it down, or he would be letting it off when he did not intend to.

But Denis ignored the suggestion, and kept his hand upon the trigger, while he watched every movement of the Crees with eyes full of animosity.

The spokesmen of the Indians were talking together, awaiting the result of Lieut. Franklin's conference with his companions, when somehow or other what the Orkney boatman had apprehended took place.

The boy's gun went off with a startling report, and the bullet whistled perilously close to the head of the three Indians who had been conducting the negotiations.

Instantly the Crees were roused to fury. They naturally suspected treachery, and, levelling their guns upon the others, were just about to pour in a deadly volley, when Lieut. Franklin, recking nothing of the danger to which he was exposing himself, threw down his gun and sprang into the open space between the two parties, extending his hands to show that they were empty, and crying out :

‘ Don't fire, for God's sake ! It was only an accident. We mean you no harm.’

Although the Indians did not fully understand his words, the purport of his action was perfectly clear, and they kept their fingers on the triggers of their

guns while the lieutenant continued to advance towards them, saying—

‘We mean peace, not blood. It was only a boy’s blunder. Come, let us smoke the pipe of peace together.’

The *voyageur* who had been translating before, having hurried to Lieut. Franklin’s side, made haste to repeat his words to the Crees, and on hearing them the fierce looks left their features, and, lowering their guns, they calmly awaited the issue.

The end of it all was that, after some further parleying and the smoking of the calumet, the request of the Indians for tobacco and spirits was granted in part, and they agreed to send two of their number with the expedition until they came within sight of the next Hudson Bay Company’s Post.

So soon as this was satisfactorily settled, Lieut. Franklin called Denis to him, and spoke very sternly about his carelessness. ‘If you cannot manage your gun better, my boy,’ he said, ‘I will have to take it from you.’

Denis just sulked and said nothing. He was disappointed at the tame conclusion of the affair, and, although he did not dare say so, would not have been particularly sorry if his accidental shot had precipitated a conflict, provided of course the Crees got the worst of it, and he came out with a whole skin.

Keeping steadily on day after day, in spite of heavy snow, the expedition passed Stinking Lake, Pelican Lake, and Green Lake, where there was a Hudson Bay fort, at which they rested a couple of days, and thence on to the Beaver River and Long Lake, until at last the Post at Isle à la Crosse Lake was reached, and their arrival was greeted with a volley of

musketry, by which attention Lieut. Franklin was much gratified.

The stage from Green Lake to Isle à la Crosse had been a very comfortable one for the Englishmen, as they were provided with carioles, in which, snugly wrapped in buffalo robes, they could ride at ease, and they found this mode of progress a vast improvement upon the toilsome snow-shoes.

‘It’s a pity we can’t go right up to the Arctic Ocean in this fashion,’ said Mr. Back, with a smile of contentment at his present comfort. ‘It might not be a very heroic way of accomplishing our purpose, but that would not matter.’

‘Ah, indeed,’ responded Lieut. Franklin. ‘We may be thankful if we don’t have to drag the sledges ourselves before we get through with that part of our journey. I’m not counting upon anything but hardship up there.’

An expectation that was only too sadly fulfilled, as will in due time appear.

The expedition was warmly welcomed at both the fur companies’ posts, which stood close to each other on the southern shore of the lake.

They were establishments of considerable importance, being placed at a point of communication with the English River, the Athabasca, and the Columbia districts, and were frequented by both the Crees and Chipewyans.

Isle à la Crosse Lake received its name from an island just opposite the forts, on which the Indians assembled annually to play their national game, now known as lacrosse.

Lieut. Franklin regretted that it was not the season for the game, as he would have liked very much to

witness a match, having heard a great deal about the vigour and skill with which the Indians played.

Denis considered himself quite an expert player, and promised the lieutenant that he should certainly see the game some time during the summer, when they were at one of the posts where there were many Indians in the neighbourhood.

After a day's rest at the place, the travellers set forth, well supplied with provisions and means of conveyance, and made good progress past Deep River, Clear Lake, Buffalo Lake, and on to Beaver River, where there were two small forts.

The factor of the North-West Fur Company was so pleased at the advent of the visitors that he gave a dance in the evening, to which all hands were invited.

It was quite a lively scene, and Denis distinguished himself by playing on his piccolo in a way that greatly delighted his audience, who did not stint their expressions of appreciation of his lively music.

He also had quite an interesting experience here, that came near having rather serious consequences.

It happened in this way.

Denis had a keen eye for the fair sex. A pretty face attracted him at once, and he lost no time in showing his admiration in a frank, outspoken way.

He was, moreover, a capital dancer, and so, when among the little group of women who came in response to the factor's invitation, he espied a really pretty girl, about a year his junior, he at once made up his mind to be her partner for the evening. She was a half-breed like himself, being the daughter of one of the *voyageurs* attached to the fort, and rejoiced in the name of Julie Laplante.

Such formalities as introductions were not known in that far-away land, and Denis simply went up to the girl and claimed her hand for the dance that was about to begin.

She hesitated for a moment, and then accepted his invitation. He was undoubtedly a handsome youth, and then his being a member of the Franklin party invested him with special interest and importance, so that Julie might with good reason feel flattered at being singled out for his attentions.

They danced together after the fashion of those days, and the rest of the company thought they made a very well-matched couple.

‘Denis seems to be thoroughly enjoying himself,’ Lieut. Franklin remarked to Mr. Back, as he watched the young people with a smile of amusement and sympathy. ‘It’s to be hoped he won’t leave his heart behind him here.’

‘Trust him for that,’ replied the midshipman. ‘He’s not that kind. He’ll have as good a time as he can, and then he’ll go off and forget all about his fair charmer.’

But, while Julie herself and her own people viewed Denis’s frank admiration with approval, there was one present to whom it was gall and bitterness.

Denis was by no means Julie’s first swain. Her pretty face had already made her the object of the rough-and-ready wooing of the North-West, and the most ardent and determined of her suitors was a young French-Canadian, not a half-breed, who belonged to the garrison of the North-West Fur Company’s post.

His name was Louis Brunet, and he was a short, dark, thick-set fellow, with a face that might have

been handsome, had it not habitually borne a sinister expression that only left it when he was in particularly good humour.

Julie feared him more than she liked him, and now, noting how Denis's attentions angered him, found pleasure in tormenting him by giving herself up unreservedly to their enjoyment. This raised the evil in Brunet, and he vowed he would make Denis suffer for having thus dared to cross his chosen path.

While they all remained in the room there was nothing for him to do but sulk, and scowl, and keep his hand playing restlessly upon the handle of the knife that was stuck in his belt.

Denis, of course, being entirely ignorant of the little drama in which he was playing a leading part, recked nothing of Brunet's animosity. He did notice the dark, scowling face in one corner of the room, and, pointing it out to Julie, said laughingly:

'Who's that cross-looking chap over there? He looks as if he'd like to cut our heads off.'

Julie, without turning her eyes in the direction Denis indicated—for she knew well enough who he meant—gave a pretty little shudder of aversion as she whispered, 'That's Louis Brunet. He's furious because you are dancing with me.'

Denis threw a defiant, careless glance at the French-Canadian as he responded:

'Let him be furious. Who cares? It's none of his business. He's not your master.'

Brunet saw it all, and although he could not make out the words, he could read the expression of the speakers' faces accurately enough, and it inflamed his passion until he was equal to any deed of desperation.

As the evening advanced Denis grew more and

more infatuated, until at last in a burst of lover-like generosity he told Julie he would give her the crimson silk handkerchief that had been presented to him as a prize.

Julie's eyes flashed with delight, and she moved a little closer to his side as she murmured :

' You're so good. I will be happy to accept it.'

' Stay here a moment then, until I go and get it,' said Denis ; and away he darted, for his pack was in one of the other houses of the Post.

As he left the room Brunet silently followed, a gleam of vengeful expectation lighting up his dark eyes. He had no idea why Denis had gone out, but he was quite determined that he should not return, if he could prevent him.

Denis had been so rapid in his movements that he was half-way to the other house ere Louis got outside the door, so the latter stepped softly into the shadow of a building, and awaited his return.

He had not to wait long. Having lost no time in finding his silk handkerchief, Denis was hastening back with it, when suddenly there sprang out upon him from the shadow of the house the slighted suitor, with a knife in his hand and murder in his heart.

Well was it for Denis at that critical moment that he possessed the quickness and agility of a panther, else the cruel knife would have cleft his heart ere he could draw another breath.

He did not see the covert approach of the would-be assassin, but he instinctively felt it, and like a flash threw himself forward on the snow.

He could not possibly have dodged the dastardly blow better. Completely thrown out in his calculations, and unable to check his own onset, Brunet

pitched forward right upon Denis, the knife flying out of his hand as he made a frantic effort to recover his balance.

But, although thus foiled in his first effort, the French-Canadian was not to be baulked of his revenge, and gripping Denis ere he could extricate himself, he strove to throttle him with his sinewy hands, while he hissed through his clenched teeth, 'Ah—pig—I will kill you—I will kill you!'

Matters now began to look very serious for Denis, as Brunet far outmatched him in strength, and moreover had the advantage of the first hold.

His fingers pressed so hard on Denis's throat that the boy could not utter a sound, and he was fast being choked into insensibility when two of the *voyageurs* attached to the expedition came out of the door of the house where the dance was going on, and seeing the struggle at once rushed to the rescue.

They quickly tore Brunet off Denis, and then proceeded to belabour him so soundly with their fists that he was fain to roar for mercy.

But they were highly incensed at his daring thus to attack one of their party, and withheld not their hands until the factor of the fort appeared and bade them desist.

On hearing from Denis what had occurred, he ordered that Brunet should be confined in one of the store-houses until the morning, and order being thus restored, the others returned to the dance. It seemed that Julie, her woman's wit telling her that Brunet's leaving the room boded no good to Denis, had gone to the *voyageurs* whose advent on the scene was so timely, and begged them to go after him.

They demurred at first, being reluctant to miss any

of the fun, but finally consented, with the result already described.

Julie thus doubly deserved the handkerchief, which Denis gallantly presented to her, and which she promptly arranged about her neck, blushing with pride and pleasure until her own cheeks almost vied with its ruddy tint.

It was full midnight before the amusements ended, and Denis, on parting with Julie, vowed he would not forget her while far up in the North, and would certainly visit the Post again on his way back.

The following morning the little expedition continued its journey, travelling steadily day after day, the dog-sledges enabling the Englishmen to proceed with great comfort.

They thus passed Methye Portage ; Cascade Portage, where they found a small encampment of Chipe-wyan Indians, and smoked the calumet with them ; Pembina River, on whose bank was another encampment, the members of which were in a miserable condition, owing to their having recently destroyed all their property, in token of grief at the death of some relatives ; and so came to the Post at Pierre au Calumet, where they had a warm welcome from Mr. Stuart, the senior partner of the North-West Company in the Athabasca department.

Mr. Stuart had twice traversed the continent, having reached the Pacific Ocean by going down the Columbia River ; and Lieut. Franklin got from him much valuable advice as to the conduct of his expedition, but he was much troubled at being assured that there was small chance of his being able to persuade any experienced Canadian *voyageurs* to accompany him to the Arctic Ocean, because of their great

dread of the Esquimaux, who had already destroyed the crew of one canoe sent to open up trade with those who lived at the mouth of the Mackenzie River.

‘I’m sorry to hear that,’ said Lieut. Franklin. ‘It is not what I expected at all.’ I thought the Esquimaux were a very peaceable and harmless people who would cordially welcome visitors from the South.’

‘On the contrary, they’re the biggest thieves and rascals in the country,’ returned Mr. Stuart emphatically; ‘and I frankly confess I don’t envy you for the task you’ve undertaken. If you should fall into their hands, there’ll be small chance of your getting out of them again, to judge from all I’ve heard of them.’

This was certainly very disquieting information, and the lieutenant was glad that only himself and Mr. Back were present when Mr. Stuart was speaking, for if the members of his little expedition got hold of it, his whole plan might be frustrated ere it had been fairly tried.

He therefore begged Mr. Stuart to say nothing more about the matter, and he would make further inquiry at Fort Chipewyan.

In his own mind he believed that the stories about the Esquimaux had been greatly exaggerated, and that if he met them he would be able to secure their confidence, and receive kind treatment at their hands.

CHAPTER XII

THE STORM ON THE LAKE

IN spite of the cold, which was intense, the thermometer registering forty-three degrees below zero at night, and of a threatened change in the weather, the expedition set out from Pierre au Calumet (so called because the stone out of which the Indian peace pipes were made abounded in the vicinity), and made good progress along the frozen bosom of the river, doing fourteen miles the first day, and nearly twenty the second.

The next day they caught up with an old Canadian, who was resting his dogs during the heat of the sun. He was carrying meat from some Indian lodges to Fort Chipewyan, having a load of two hundred and fifty pounds upon his sledge, and only two miserable little dogs to drag it.

They passed him on the way, but he came up while they were in camp for the night, and the Englishmen were much amused at a heated argument which took place between him and their own sledge men as to the respective merits of their dogs.

The old Canadian got so excited that he offered to bet the whole of his wages that his two dogs, poor and lean as they were, would drag their heavy load

to Fort Chipewyan at a better rate than any three of those belonging to the expedition.

Struck by what seemed to him such utter rashness, Lieut. Franklin asked the old man why he had such confidence in the superiority of his own animals, and he replied that the men from the lower countries did not understand the management of their dogs, and could not get the same amount of work out of them that he could out of his.

Wishing to have the veteran's guidance to the fort, Lieut. Franklin waived the question as to the respective merits of the dog teams, and promised him a reward if he would show them the shortest and best way to their destination, to which arrangement he gladly assented.

He proved an excellent guide, and barring a day's detention at Embarras River, where they were snow-bound, they advanced steadily until at last, in the afternoon of March 26, they arrived at Fort Chipewyan, having completed a toilsome and difficult winter's journey of no less than eight hundred and fifty miles, without the loss of a man or dog, or any mishap worth mentioning.

Messrs. Keith and Black, the partners of the North-West Company in charge of the establishment, gave the expedition a right royal reception, and, with the comforting sense of having accomplished something to be proud of, they settled down for a good rest at this important Post.

Lieut. Franklin at once set about obtaining all the information he could concerning that part of his adventurous journey which still lay before him, and was glad to find several men who had been in those northern regions.

One of the North-West Company's interpreters, a half-breed named Beaubien, who had been brought up amongst the Dog-ribbed and Copper Indians, gave him directions—which were afterwards found to be tolerably correct—respecting the way to the Coppermine River, which he had descended a considerable distance.

He even sketched out on the floor an outline of the river, and of the coast at its mouth, and just as he had finished an old Chipewyan Indian named Black Meat came in, who at once recognized the plan, and nodded vigorous approval of its accuracy.

He then took the bit of charcoal from Beaubien and added a track along the sea-coast, which he had followed on returning from a war-excursion of his tribe against the Esquimaux.

Another source of information was an old Chipewyan named Rabbit's Head, a step-son of the famous chief Matonnabee, who had guided the explorer Hearn on his journey to the sea.

Rabbit's Head had been one of Hearn's party, although a mere boy at the time, and had much to tell of their hardships and danger. He claimed to be the only survivor of that expedition, and Lieut. Franklin gave him a medal in recognition of the fact.

He told a very interesting legend respecting the discovery of the copper mine from which the river got its name.

'The Chipewyans supposed that the Esquimaux originally inhabited land to the north that was separated by sea from the Canadian country, and that in the earliest ages of the world a party of them came over and stole a woman from the Indians, whom they carried back and kept in slavery. She was very

unhappy in her situation, and after many years' captivity succeeded in effecting her escape.

'The poor lonely woman had wandered about for days, not knowing what direction to take, when she chanced upon a beaten path that led her to the sea. At the sight of the ocean, her hope of being able to return to her own people vanished, and she sat herself down in despair, and gave way to tears.

'A great grey wolf now came up, but, instead of attacking her, it proceeded to caress her gently, even licking the tears from her cheeks, and seeming to be doing its best to say to her—

"Don't despair—cry no more. I will show you the way home."

'When she had become more composed the wolf walked into the water, turning back to look at her with an expression that plainly meant—

"Follow me—there is no danger."

'Perceiving that the water did not reach up to the body of the animal, the woman thereupon plucked up courage to follow, but before doing so provided herself with two sticks by way of support. For five days she followed her strange guide, resting herself when fatigued upon the sticks, whose upper ends she had fastened together, and at last her daring perseverance was crowned with success, for she reached her native shore in safety.

'Here the wolf left her, but she found reindeer in plenty, and was able to kill sufficient to supply herself with food and clothing for the winter.

'She built herself a hut in Esquimaux fashion, and lived in it until the spring, when she set forth to find her people.

'She had not gone far when she was surprised by

observing a glittering appearance on a distant hill, and on going up to it she found that the hill was entirely composed of copper.

‘Breaking off some pieces, she beat them flat and attached them to her dress, as she thought the metal might be very useful to her people, if she ever found them again.

‘Thus decorated, she kept on her way inland, and presently, to her great joy, fell in with a band from her own tribe, who welcomed her as from the dead.

‘To them she told her discovery, and offered to lead them to the spot. They gladly consented, and, having had the wisdom to leave marks to indicate the route, she had no difficulty in guiding them aright.

‘They were filled with joy at the discovery of the copper, and almost at once the young men of the band began to quarrel among themselves as to who should have the girl for his wife.

‘The controversy became so violent that she fled from them in terror, and climbed the copper mountain to escape their alarming attentions.

‘The moment she gained the summit, the earth opened, and engulfed both herself and the mountain, to the utter dismay of the young men, who then repented of their undue ardour.

‘But their repentance was too late ; and ever since that event copper has been found only in small quantities scattered over the surface of the earth.’

While Lieut. Franklin was securing information as to the difficult enterprise that lay before him, and listening to the history and legends of the natives, Denis was amusing himself after his own fashion.

He had, of course, nothing in the way of work to

do, and there being a large number of people gathered together at Fort Chipewyan, employés, *voyageurs*, hunters, half-breeds, and Indians, he had no lack of society.

He went about winning friends in his own frank, genial way, always ready to play on his piccolo and make himself agreeable.

He thus became a general favourite, and enjoyed himself thoroughly.

Lake Athabasca had still been covered with its winter breastplate of ice when the expedition arrived, but by the end of May it was perfectly clear of ice, and the weather being fine and warm, Denis's thoughts turned to canoeing, of which he was very fond. There were canoes in plenty to be had for the asking, and every day saw him out on the water paddling or sailing about the lake, or pulling in the fish with which it abounded.

One day he proposed to Mr. Back that they should take a trip up the lake, to a place where he had been told there were ducks in abundance.

As they had been living principally on fish since their arrival at the fort, the midshipman gladly consented, and, accompanied by an Indian lad as guide, they set out in the early morning.

'We will bring back much ducks,' Denis said with a confident smile to Lieut. Franklin. 'Fine fat ducks, and you will be glad, eh?'

'That I will, Denis,' replied the lieutenant. 'A roast duck will be a great treat; but mind you take good care of yourself, and don't run any unnecessary risks. I can't spare Mr. Back, you know, and I'd be sorry to lose you, so be sure and come back all right.'

‘Yes, certainly,’ responded Denis. ‘We come back sure, and bring plenty ducks.’

They went in a good, staunch, roomy canoe, taking their guns and plenty of ammunition, both shot and ball, so as to be ready for whatever they might encounter.

‘We not come back, three, four days,’ Denis said, ‘so as get plenty ducks.’

Mr. Back did not commit himself to any promise. It was just a little picnic for him. If they did succeed in bagging a lot of birds, it would be very gratifying; but even if they did not get a feather, they would have a good outing anyway, and he would have some practice in canoeing.

The wind being from the west, they hoisted a sail on starting, and went up the lake in fine style, keeping on until midday, when they landed for dinner in a snug little cove.

There being a marsh on the other side of the point which gave promise of game, they paid it a visit, and were rewarded by securing three brace of birds in good condition.

This was certainly promising, and encouraged them to proceed still farther the following day, to a place where the Indian lad assured them they would find all the ducks they could kill.

That night the mosquitoes made their lives miserable, and they were glad when morning came, so that after a hasty breakfast they could escape the pitiless pests by going out on the lake.

But, in the meantime, there had been a change in the weather, and the prospects for the day were not such as might be desired.

Mr. Back, whose experience at sea had made him

tolerably weather-wise, did not like the look of the sky.

‘I shouldn’t wonder if we’re in for a storm, Denis,’ he said, scrutinizing it carefully. ‘If I were at sea, I’d be sure of it. Do you know if sudden storms occur on this lake?’

Now Denis, being almost a child of Nature, was no less quick than the midshipman to discern the signs of the sky; but he was very eager to push ahead, that no time might be lost in reaching the locality where the ducks were plentiful, and so he replied according to his inclinations, not according to his knowledge.

‘Oh no! not much wind here. Only little wind. We won’t mind it — this good canoe, eh, Chipe-wyan?’ turning to the Indian, who nodded assent, although he but dimly comprehended what Denis had said.

Not altogether reassured, but reluctant to show what might seem like timorousness, Mr. Back said no more, although from time to time he cast somewhat anxious glances at the lowering clouds.

In order to reach their destination they had to cross the lake at a part where it narrowed considerably, and the wind being in their quarter, they put up the sail, so as to make the best speed possible.

Their light craft flew over the waves like a bird, and Mr. Back was filled with admiration at the wonderful skill shown by Denis and the young Indian in its management.

He realized that all his experience in big heavy ships’ boats would have counted for little at this time, and was quite content to take no part, but to trust himself unquestioningly to the two lads, who never

appeared to be in doubt for a moment as to what they should do.

It was ticklish work, too, for the waves were growing rapidly larger as the wind increased in strength, and the canoe seemed to be springing from one to the other, rather than cutting through the water.

By the time they reached the middle of the lake the wind had risen to a positive gale, and the water ran so high that it was impossible for them to continue in their course, as the waves were breaking over the gunwale.

'We can't keep on our tack, Denis,' said the midshipman. 'We must just run before the wind. Let us get down the sail immediately.'

But they were spared the trouble by a sudden sharp blast, which threw the canoe over on her side, and snapped the light mast off short.

Indeed, had the mast not broken just in time, they must have been altogether capsized. As it was they shipped a great deal of water, which they at once set to work to bail out with their caps.

Giving up all idea of making the opposite shore until the storm abated, they allowed the canoe to be driven by the wind up the lake, not knowing what would be the end of the matter.

'We're in for a hard time, Denis,' said Mr. Back, his countenance grave with apprehension. 'It looks as if the wind was going to keep up for some time, and it will blow us nobody knows how far.'

Denis tried hard to look unconcerned, but he could not disguise his own anxiety, and there was an unmistakable tremor in his voice as he responded :

'Wind blow very hard for sure, but this good canoe, and we'll be all right. Soon get to shore.'

As for the Indian lad, his tawny features showed no signs of nervousness whatever.

Kneeling in the bow of the canoe, he wielded his paddle with the dexterity that was part of his birth-right, and took no part in conversation with the other two.

Thus the canoe flew on before the wind, again and again escaping almost miraculously the swamping that constantly threatened her, and that was only to be evaded by the most skilful strokes of the paddles.

For two hours or more this harrowing situation continued, and then at last the wind began to abate its violence, the waves lost their white caps and grew more subdued, and it was possible to consider turning the bow of the canoe shoreward.

But which way should they turn? To right or to left?—for the storm had blown them clear out of sight of land, and they were in the midst of the great lake, whose waters extended for scores of miles east and west.

Mr. Back realized his helplessness as to giving any advice. Their course must be determined by Denis and the Indian lad, for he was completely lost. How he wished for a compass, and berated himself for having coming away without one!

Had the sun only been visible, they might have guided themselves by it, but it was completely hidden behind heavy grey clouds, and there was absolutely nothing else to help them. They were as utterly lost in a trackless waste of water as if in mid-ocean. Denis and the Indian consulted together, but it was evident they held different opinions, Denis thinking the nearest land lay to the right, while the Indian was sure it lay to the left.

Mr. Back observed them anxiously as they argued, and chafed at his inability to give counsel on either side.

At last, unable to keep silence any longer, he called out: 'Do what the Indian says, Denis. He knows the lake better than we do. Let us follow his directions.'

Looking rather sulky, but not venturing upon further opposition, Denis said no more, and the canoe was pointed in the direction the Indian had insisted upon.

Then followed long hours at the paddles, which the midshipman shared to the best of his ability; but, in spite of their unsparing exertions, the darkness came on ere, wellnigh exhausted by their labours, they reached the land and drew up the canoe, thankful beyond measure at being once more upon the solid ground, but entirely at a loss as to where they were, and their distance from Fort Chipewyan.

'We must be a long way from the fort, Denis,' said Mr. Back, 'and we'll have to make the best of it here, though it seems a poor place to camp.'

It was indeed a poor place, being a kind of promontory jutting out into the lake, with very little wood upon it, and that so thin and stunted as to be little better than shrubbery.

'I wish we'd brought a tent with us,' continued the midshipman. 'There's nothing in the way of cover here.'

Happily, they had their hatchets, and soon had a big fire blazing cheerily in a sheltered corner, which put them in better spirits.

But the night was chilly, for summer had not yet come, and they could not sleep because of the cold,

so that the following morning found them in a very uncomfortable condition.

What made matters worse, the weather, instead of improving, grew nasty again ; a violent storm of wind and rain breaking upon them, that intensified their misery, and made Mr. Back feel not a little concerned as to the ultimate issue of their outing.

They did not venture to launch the canoe, for the waves ran so high that she could not have faced them for a moment, and the wind was still blowing from the west.

Drenched to the skin, shivering with cold and faint with hunger, they were certainly a wretched trio ; and as the dreary hours dragged by to the close of another day, Mr. Back made up his mind that, if there was no improvement in the weather on the morrow, they would wait no longer where they were, but if they could not use the canoe, they would set out for Fort Chipewyan overland.

Another night of misery, and then, to their unspeakable relief, the day dawned bright and promising.

The wind had changed to the south and the sky was clear of clouds, so that the sun poured its welcome warmth upon them, putting new life into their shivering bodies.

‘Ha, ha!’ exclaimed Mr. Back hopefully. ‘We’ll be all right now. We can start for the fort to-day.’

Denis, too, brightened up as he said :

‘We must get ducks first, though. Not go back without ducks.’ He was bound to fulfil his pledge to Lieut. Franklin, and would rather have stayed out a week than go back empty-handed.

They were drying themselves in the welcome sunshine, and getting ready to launch the canoe, when

suddenly there appeared from around the promontory four canoes filled with Indians, at sight of whom the Indian lad with them, whose name was Nitchie, gave a cry of alarm, and cowered close to Mr. Back, as if he would put himself under his protection.

CHAPTER XIII

DENIS REDEEMS HIS REPUTATION

SURPRISED at Nitchie's action, Mr. Back scrutinized the new-comers narrowly, while Denis took up his gun, and held it in readiness for use.

The canoes contained a score of Indians, and as the midshipman observed their countenances, he was not long in coming to the conclusion that a more villainous-looking lot of men he had never seen.

'Who are they, Nitchie? and where do they come from?' he asked of the terrified lad at his side.

As best he could Nitchie explained that they belonged to the tribe known in that region as the Quarrellers, and that they had the worst possible reputation for deeds of violence and blood.

Resistance, of course, was out of the question, so, putting on as brave a front as possible, Mr. Back faced the situation. 'Keep still and quiet now, Denis,' he said. 'Let me talk to them if I can, and perhaps no harm will come to us.'

With a chorus of strange cries and whoops, the Indians beached their canoes and surrounded the three strangers. They were armed with bows and arrows and tomahawks, but had no guns, and it was evident from the greedy looks they cast at the guns

Mr. Back and Denis held that these were objects of their cupidity.

‘Can you speak their language?’ Mr. Back asked Nitchie.

‘Yes,’ replied the lad. ‘I was with them for many moons;’ and he shuddered, as though the remembrance of his captivity was full of horror.

‘Then you tell them what I say,’ said Mr. Back, and, picking out the Indian who seemed to be the chief of the party, he addressed himself to him.

He told him who he was, and whence he had come, explained the object of the Franklin expedition, and how anxious its members were to bring back to the great king far over the sea a good report of the people of the land, and concluded by offering substantial rewards if the Indians would not molest them, but guide them back to the fort.

His speech, which Nitchie faithfully translated, evidently made a good impression upon its hearers, and created a division of opinion amongst them.

It would seem as if their first thought had been to put the midshipman and his companions out of the way, and possess themselves of their guns and other belongings; but what they had heard from him changed the minds of some, who became inclined to do what he asked.

There were others, however, who held to the first plan, and a controversy took place, which presently grew so warm that it seemed as if they might come to blows amongst themselves.

In the meantime Mr. Back and Denis and Nitchie were kept in harrowing suspense. They fully realized that their lives hung in the balance, and yet they were helpless in their own behalf.

At length, after a protracted and heated argument, those who were for accepting Mr. Back's offer prevailed, and, to his unspeakable relief, the Indian he had addressed, and who was the chief of the party, informed him that if he would enter into solemn covenant to do as he had promised, and would leave Denis with them as hostage for the fulfilment of his pledge, they would guide him safely back to Fort Chipewyan.

Denis did not at all take kindly to the idea of remaining in the hands of these notorious rascals, but after a little hesitation he assented to his part of the arrangement, and so the terms were concluded.

To the credit of the Quarrellers be it recorded that they carried out their promises to the letter, guiding Mr. Back and his companion to within a few miles of the fort, and then letting him and Nitchie go on, while they retained Denis until they received the rewards agreed upon, when, to his vast relief, the boy was released, and the Indians hastened back up the lake, as if fearing pursuit.

Denis was greatly disgusted at having come back to the fort minus the promised ducks. Not even the escape from the Quarrellers quite consoled him for the loss of his prestige as a hunter, and he pledged himself to redeem his reputation at the first opportunity.

Dr. Richardson and Mr. Hood having come up from Cumberland House, preparations for the continuing of the journey were now pushed forward with all speed, and by the middle of July the expedition was ready to start.

Lieut. Franklin had had three canoes got ready, and into these he stowed his men and provisions. Of

the latter, unfortunately, the stock was all too small, owing to the great scarcity prevailing at Fort Chipewyan, and the inability of the fur companies' representatives to spare any more from their scanty store. Exclusive of two barrels of flour, three cases of preserved meats, some chocolate, arrowroot, and portable soup, which Lieut. Franklin had brought from England, and intended to reserve for the journey to the coast the next season, there were only some seventy pounds of moose meat, and a little barley—but little more than enough for one day's consumption.

Yet the fact did not seem to have any depressing effect upon the *voyageurs*, who cheerfully loaded the canoes and embarked in high glee, setting up a lively paddling song, which was continued until Fort Chipewyan had been left far behind.

Despite the uncertainty as to a sufficiency of food, all the members of the party were in the best of spirits, and a merrier party probably never crossed Lake Athabasca.

Soon reaching the western boundary of the lake, the canoes entered Stony River, a short narrow stream with a swift current, that bore them rapidly to its conflux with the Peace River, whereby the Slave River was formed.

The Slave River was a magnificent stream nearly a mile in width, and they descended it with much rapidity, passing through several narrow channels formed by obstructing islands, and at one place getting into a whirlpool that threatened to be dangerous.

Here the water was spinning round and round, and when the canoes got into its power they were for a time perfectly helpless, being whirled about like chips, in spite of the utmost efforts of the *voyageurs*.

The Englishmen were at first considerably alarmed, for it seemed as if there was danger of the canoes colliding and being injured, but the paddlers laughed and shouted to each other, and presently, after having been the sport of the eddies for some time, the canoes were carried by the current beyond their influence.

Camp was pitched that evening on the swampy bank of the river, but hardly were the tents up when a terrible thunder-storm broke upon them. The rain fell in torrents, and the violence of the wind caused the river to overflow its banks, so that the camp was completely flooded.

As if this was not discomfort enough, swarms of mosquitoes succeeded the storm, and the maddening stings drove the unfortunate travellers to re-embark and continue their voyage down-stream, instead of resting for the night.

The next day was a chapter of accidents. Leaving the Slave River, the canoes entered the Dog River, and nets were set during a halt, in hopes of getting some fish, but only four small trout were obtained, so that Lieut. Franklin was compelled to issue part of the preserved meats for dinner.

Then, in crossing the crooked channel of the Dog Rapid, two of the canoes collided so violently that the sternmost had its bow broken off, and would have sunk, had it not been instantly run ashore.

But a worse thing happened at Little Rock Portage, where, while the canoes were being carried, the bow man of one of them slipped and fell, letting his burden fall upon a rock, which broke it clean in two.

Two hours were lost in sewing the detached pieces together, and covering the seam with pitch ; but this being done the canoe was as good as ever.

‘How vastly better canoes are for this sort of work than boats!’ remarked Lieut. Franklin, as he watched the repairing operations with keen interest. ‘If a boat had been broken in two, it would be impossible to do anything with it, but a canoe can be put together again, and seems not a whit the worse.’

Safely passing the Portage of the Drowned—so called because of a whole canoe-load of *voyageurs* having lost their lives while trying to run the rapids—and keeping on steadily for several days without mishap, the expedition reached the mouth of Salt River, and pitched tents there, intending to remain for a couple of days to fish and procure salt.

During all this time Denis had been taking things very quietly. While the canoes were afloat he took his turn at the paddle, and during the frequent portages he did his full share in carrying the goods across, but he had had no opportunity of going off with his gun, as he delighted to do, and he began to chafe under the monotonous routine of the toilsome days.

No one therefore hailed more gladly the halt at Salt River, and he lost no time in asking Lieut. Franklin for permission to go off shooting.

As provisions were still so scanty that the slender stock of preserved meats had to be further drawn upon, the lieutenant consented at once.

‘What do you expect to get, Denis?’ he asked with a smile. ‘Nothing less than a buffalo, I hope.’

Denis smiled back, showing his snowy teeth as he responded: ‘Not buffalo, maybe, but we’ll see. Some ducks, perhaps. Don’t know myself.’

‘Do you mind if I accompany you, Denis?’ asked Dr. Richardson, who was anxious to try his fortune too.

Denis’s response was not quite as prompt and

cordial as might have been wished. He hesitated a perceptible interval before saying, in a perfunctory tone—

‘Oh no! not mind; you come along.’

Dr. Richardson laughed. He thoroughly understood Denis, and took no umbrage.

‘You evidently think that I’ll be more bother than a benefit to you! Well, if it prove so, I’ll promise to come back, and let you go on your own hook.’

With this understanding Denis was perfectly satisfied, and so in good time they set out, taking with them as guide a young *voyageur* who was well acquainted with the country round about.

They went up Salt River, past the place where the men were filling barrels with the useful commodity so liberally provided by Nature, and kept on until they were some miles from the camp. Here a division of forces was agreed upon, Denis and his inseparable companion, Koyee, going off in one direction, and Dr. Richardson with the *voyageur*, Baptiste, in another.

‘Now Denis, let us see who’ll have the best luck,’ said the doctor, giving the boy a clap on the shoulder. ‘It’s two to two, for Koyee is as good as a man, if not better.’

Denis had not the least doubt that he and his dog would prove a match for the other two, and so they separated, each determined to outshine the other if possible.

Denis followed the course of the river, but Baptiste took Dr. Richardson out across the prairie to a small lake of which he knew, where ducks and snipe were usually plentiful at this time of the year.

Nor were his expectations unfounded. They came upon several fine flocks, from which they took heavy

toll, and, having secured all they could comfortably carry, they returned to the spot where they were to meet Denis for the return to camp.

In the meantime how had our enterprising young hero fared? He, too, had seen ducks in tempting numbers, but had refrained from firing at them because of a curious feeling he had, which indeed he could not explain to himself, that nobler game was within reach, and that if he was only patient he would come upon it.

His delight, therefore, may be conceived when Koyee, who had been ranging about, swift in his movements as a swallow, but as noiseless as a shadow, suddenly broke out with a sharp excited bark that betokened his discovery of something important. He was hidden from sight in a hollow of the river bank, but Denis hastened towards him and exclaimed joyfully:

‘Koyee found buffalo for sure. Good! good! good!’ for he knew it was no small game his dog had sighted.

He was therefore not so much surprised as delighted when, on reaching the edge of the bank and looking over, he saw Koyee baying a fine young buffalo bull.

The animal had evidently been driven away from the herd by an older and stronger rival, and thus had been condemned to solitary bachelorhood until he should be able to set up a family on his own account.

At such times the young bulls are very irritable and reckless. They are at odds with the world, and give place to nothing that comes their way.

This particular fellow was accordingly in fine humour for a fight, and was doing his very best to give Koyee a taste of his horns.

But the clever dog was too agile for him. Bounding and barking in front of him, he dodged all his clumsy efforts to trample on him or gore him.

‘Bravo, Koyee! You good dog! Bravo!’

At his master’s praise Koyee redoubled his energy, so that the bull became bewildered for a moment, and stood stock still. This was the chance Denis was awaiting, and levelling his gun he took aim behind the shoulder.

But just as he pulled the trigger the bull made a sudden bound forward, and the leaden messenger, instead of reaching his heart, struck him in the hind quarter, inflicting a painful although not deadly wound.

The report of the gun, however, revealed to him a new enemy, and ignoring Koyee, who was forced to transfer his attentions from the bull’s head to his feet, the maddened creature charged up the slope at Denis with such astonishing agility that the boy had no time to reload, and, holding his empty gun, was forced to take refuge in flight.

At first he ran without any further object than to keep out of reach of the bull’s horns, but after the first thrill of fear had passed he realized the futility of this, and set himself to think of some way of gaining sufficient time to reload.

Fifty yards away stood a small clump of willows. They were neither tall nor thick, but they would serve as a temporary protection, and so towards them he ran, straining every nerve. It was so exciting a race that it seemed a pity there were no spectators to witness it. Denis had only a few yards’ start, and the bull, despite his clumsy appearance, got over the ground at an astonishing pace.

Indeed, he was manifestly gaining at every stride, and Denis could hear the heavy thud of his hoofs so close that every instant he expected to feel his horns strike him in the back, when just in time he reached the edge of the willow clump, and, inspired by a happy thought, sprang to one side when the bull's nose was within less than a yard of his spine.

Unable to check his furious charge, the bull plunged headlong into the willows, blinding himself for the moment, and tripping on the tough roots, so that he fell sprawling.

This was the opportunity for which Denis was waiting to reload, and he hastily rammed down the charge, getting it in just in time to dodge another fierce dash from the bull, who had succeeded in extricating himself after a frantic struggle.

But now Koyee was at his nose instead of his heels, barking and snapping so sharply that the harried animal was forced to give him his attention, instead of pursuing Denis. Thus the latter was enabled to cap his gun and be ready for another shot.

But he knew right well that he must make sure work of it this time, and so he was in no hurry to fire. He would wait until he could plant the bullet in the very spot he wished.

So rapid, however, were the movements of the buffalo, that this was not easily done, and ere he could accomplish it the powerful animal, thrusting Koyee aside, made a plunge at him that again put him to flight.

This time he ran towards the river bank at a spot where it formed a sharp declivity. He had a scheme

in mind that he hoped would end the struggle, of which he was most heartily weary.

Keeping just in front of the bull, he ran on until he was but a yard from the brink of the bank. Then, suddenly swerving aside and stopping, he let the bull thunder past him and pitch helter-skelter over the bank into the soft clay below, where he instantly sank up to his girth.

‘Eh, good! I kill you now for sure!’ panted Denis, and waiting a moment for his nerves to steady, he took careful aim at the helpless buffalo.

The bullet went straight to its destination this time, and, shot through the heart, the bull rolled over, dead beyond a peradventure.

Denis’s delight was not to be expressed in words. He danced about on the river bank, uttering joyous whoops of triumph, to which Koyee added his noisy barking, and it was some minutes before he calmed down sufficiently to consider what was to be done with his prize.

He would have liked to hunt up Dr. Richardson, that he might crow over him a little, but he knew the best thing to do was to hasten back to the camp, and report his success.

So he set off down the river bank at an easy run, Koyee bounding along beside him, and, not sparing himself at all, for he was impatient to announce his good fortune, reached camp so blown and played out that Lieut. Franklin thought he must have been chased by hostile Indians.

As soon as he got his breath, however, he put that notion out of the lieutenant’s mind, and aroused his incredulity by telling what he had shot.

‘A buffalo, Denis—a buffalo?’ the lieutenant ex-

claimed. 'Come, now, aren't you trying to make game of us?'

'You come and you see,' panted Denis, with a brilliant smile of assurance on his flushed face.

Just then he espied Dr. Richardson and Baptiste returning with their burden of birds, and, darting up to them, cried: 'What you get? What you get? I got a buffalo, me. What you get?'

'You got a buffalo, Denis?' exclaimed Dr. Richardson. 'I don't believe you. There are no buffalo so far north as this.'

All this doubting of his statement was fine fun for Denis. He could scarce contain himself for delight at the situation, and presently the others began to be convinced. He surely could not be joking when he was so persistent.

Accordingly it was decided to send a canoe up the river to where Denis said the buffalo lay, and with him sitting proudly in the bow, it was promptly dispatched.

Sure enough, there was the buffalo bull, a fine fat fellow, weighing many hundred pounds, and able to afford a most welcome supply of meat that would last the whole party a week.

Lieut. Franklin was pleased beyond measure. There would be no further need of drawing upon his scanty stock of preserved meat, and he congratulated Denis heartily upon his success.

'You're a veritable treasure, Denis, and it was a good day for me when I consented to let you come with us.'

Of course this all delighted Denis immensely. He was the hero of the moment, a position that he hugely enjoyed, and he strutted about looking as

proud as a young turkey-cock, so that Mr. Hood could not refrain from saying banteringly :

‘Crow, Denis, crow ! it would relieve your feelings, I’m sure.’ Denis, realizing that he was making himself ridiculous, flushed to the roots of his hair, and subsided into his ordinary demeanour.

Pushing ahead with quickened speed, thanks to the abundant supply of food, the expedition reached Great Slave Lake, and halted for a short time at Moose Deer Island, where Lieut. Franklin engaged a half-breed named Pierre St. Germain to act as interpreter when they came to the Copper Indians.

The voyage along the shore of the big lake, and across its wide bays to Fort Providence, was attended with some risk, owing to the prevalence of high winds, and the danger of breaking the canoes upon the numerous sunken rocks that beset their course, and could not be seen because of the turbid state of the water.

More than one narrow escape was experienced, and every member of the party felt devoutly thankful when at last the fort was reached without mishap, and the strain of anxiety over.

At this place the North-West Company had the field all to themselves, the Hudson Bay Company not maintaining any Posts to the northward of Great Slave Lake.

Frederick Wentzel, who was in charge at Fort Providence, gave the expedition a warm welcome, and assured Lieut. Franklin of his readiness to do whatever was in his power to further his undertaking.

Unfortunately, what he had to say on the vital question of provisions was far from cheering. The Indian hunters, upon whom the establishment chiefly

depended for its supply, had been bringing in very little meat of late, and there was practically none to spare at the fort. The hunters were then encamped some miles distant, and, feeling it to be of the utmost importance that they should be inspired to extra energy without delay, Lieut. Franklin sent off for the chief to come to see him, which the latter promised to do the next morning.

This audience with the Indian, whose hearty co-operation was so essential to the success of the expedition, was therefore awaited with no small anxiety.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ESTABLISHING OF FORT ENTERPRISE

CLEARLY understanding how important it was to make as deep and lasting an impression as possible upon the Indians whose assistance meant so much, Lieut. Franklin prepared to receive them with the utmost formality.

The four Englishmen therefore put on their naval uniforms, and hung medals around their necks, while their tents were pitched in a prominent place with a silken Union Jack flying over the lieutenant's.

Soon after noon the Indians came in their canoes, the foremost one containing the chief, who on landing walked up to the shore with a measured and dignified step, looking neither to right nor left at the throng of spectators, and preserving the same immobility of countenance until he had reached the hall of the fort, where he was introduced by Mr. Wentzel to Lieut. Franklin and his associates.

It was a fine exhibition of native dignity which the Englishmen greatly admired, although Denis, standing aloof, had a contemptuous sneer on his swarthy face as he muttered :

‘Indian think himself big, but he only Copper Indian all the same.’

So profound was his respect for and passionate his

attachment to Lieut. Franklin, that, aside from his contempt for Indians in general, he could not brook the idea of any chief setting himself to vie with the lieutenant in importance.

Having smoked his pipe and drunk his glass of spirits and water, Akaitcho, or Big-Foot, as he was called, then proceeded to make a speech, which he had evidently carefully prepared for the occasion.

The gist of it was that he was rejoiced to see such great white chiefs in his country. His people were poor, but they loved their white brethren, who had been their benefactors, and he hoped that the visit of the expedition would do much good.

He further said that the report which had preceded their arrival had caused him great disappointment, for it was rumoured that a great medicine chief was in the party who could restore the dead to life, and this made him very glad, for then he might be able to see his departed relatives again, but afterwards Mr. Wentzel had told him that it was a mistake, and he felt as if his friends had been a second time taken from him.

He concluded by averring his willingness to accompany the expedition, and do all that he could to contribute towards the accomplishment of its purposes.

In reply to this long harangue, which was admirably delivered, for the chief was a born orator and a man of great natural dignity, Lieut. Franklin, no mean speaker himself, said in substance that the expedition had been sent out by the greatest chief of the world, who was the sovereign also of the fur companies in the country; that he was the friend of peace, and had the interest of all the tribes at heart.

Having learned that his children in the North were much in want of many articles of merchandise, in

consequence of the great length and difficulty of the overland trade route, he had sent the expedition to search for a passage by the sea, which, if found, would enable big vessels to carry large quantities of goods more easily to the country.

Furthermore that the expedition had not come for the purpose of traffic, but solely to make discoveries for the benefit of the natives. That they desired the assistance of the Indians as guides and hunters; and finally, that they had been most positively enjoined by the great chief to urge that hostilities should cease throughout the country, and especially between the Indians and Esquimaux, both of whom he considered equally his children.

Akaitcho responded by a renewal of his assurances that he and his party would attend the expedition to the end of the journey. He admitted that his tribe had made war upon the Esquimaux, but said they were now desirous of peace. He added, however, that the Esquimaux were very treacherous, and therefore recommended that the advance toward them should be made with much caution.

The conference, having thus proceeded quite satisfactorily, was concluded by mutual expressions of confidence and good feeling, and by Lieut. Franklin transferring his medal to the neck of Akaitcho, while the other officers presented those they were wearing to a brother of the chief and the two guides, this public decoration being highly appreciated by the recipients.

Preparations for the advance from Fort Providence were now pushed forward with the utmost diligence, and on the first day of August the start was made.

The expedition was composed as follows: Lieut.

Franklin, Dr. Richardson, Messrs. Back and Hood, Mr. Wentzel, John Hepburn, an English seaman, Denis, seventeen Canadian *voyageurs*, and two interpreters, named St. Germain and Adam, both belonging to the Chipewyan Bois Brule tribe.

Besides the men, there were four women, the wives of *voyageurs*, brought along for the purpose of making moccasins and clothing, and also three children belonging to the women.

The stores carried consisted of two barrels of gunpowder, one hundred and forty pounds of ball and shot, a few trading guns, eight pistols, a couple of dozen daggers, some packages of knives, chisels, axes, nails, &c., a small quantity of cloth, blankets, needles, looking-glasses, and beads.

In the matter of food they had a couple of casks of flour, two hundred dried reindeer tongues, together with a little portable soup and arrowroot, two cases of chocolate, and two canisters of tea, the whole quantity being sufficient for not more than ten days' consumption.

It was a miserably inadequate supply, and, as will be seen, the lack of proper provisions and stores entailed terrible hardships, but Lieut. Franklin had faith in the ability of the country to supply the food they would require, and so he set out with no misgivings upon that score.

They took four canoes, three large ones for the men and the stores, and a smaller one for the women and children; and all were in high spirits, although their course was to be directed through a line of country never previously visited by Europeans, and concerning which they had only the imperfect reports of the Indians.

At the entrance of the Yellow Knife River the expedition was joined by the Indians, who had no less than seventeen canoes filled with men, women, and children, and who kept up a constant bedlam as they paddled along.

‘What a noisy lot they are!’ said Lieut. Franklin, whose ears had grown weary of the ceaseless chatter and shouting. ‘If it wouldn’t look ungracious, I’d like to give them a wide berth, but I suppose we’ll just have to put up with their company, they’re so indispensable to us.’

Throughout the month steady progress northward was made, in spite of a thousand difficulties that wore out the strength of the *voyageurs* and tried the resolution of the leaders of the expedition.

Long and exhausting portages were of frequent occurrence, the Yellow Knife River, whose course they ascended for over one hundred and fifty miles, abounding in rapids through which the canoes could not pass, but had to be carried around with all their heavy cargo.

One of these portages exceeded a mile in length, and had to be traversed several times, as all the stores could not be carried at once.

Had food been plentiful, so that the men could keep up their strength, the toils of the journey, however severe, would not have mattered so much, but unfortunately the Indian hunters brought in no meat, and the nets, which were set at every opportunity, yielded no fish, so that at last Lieut. Franklin had to fall back upon his slender stock of portable soup and arrowroot to ward off starvation.

But this stuff, although much enjoyed by the *voyageurs*, was by no means sufficiently substantial

to sustain them long ; so the hunters were sent ahead to see if they could not find reindeer, with orders to signal their success, if they had any, by lighting fires on the hill-top.

Denis was so eager to go off with the hunters that after much coaxing Lieut. Franklin consented. It was dull work for the boy staying by the canoes, and there was nothing particular for him to do anyway.

‘Be sure and bring me back word so soon as you get some deer, Denis,’ was the lieutenant’s parting injunction. ‘Matters are growing serious, and unless we secure plenty of meat very soon we’ll have to go back, that’s all.’

Denis promised to lose no time in bringing the good news, and went off with the Indians, quite content to be in their society, when it meant substituting for the toil and tedium of portaging the excitement and novelty of reindeer hunting.

Meanwhile the expedition pressed on by river, lake, and portage, catching a few fish now and then, that just served to ward off starvation.

At Icy Portage, a curious place where the ice remained all summer, they had a narrow escape from losing everything by fire.

The valley was filled with moss, which became ignited at night from the camp fire, and blazed up fiercely, encircling the encampment and threatening the destruction of the canoes and baggage.

There was great excitement for a time, and it seemed at first as if the rescue of their property from the flames was impossible ; but, happily, by all hands working hard, and not hesitating to take risks, the goods were removed to a place of safety and the fire extinguished.

On reaching Reindeer Lake, it was found necessary to halt for a day or two, as three of the *voyageurs* were lame, and several others had swollen legs, due to their arduous labour and lack of proper food.

All the nets were set, the Indians having stated that it was a good water for fish; but they caught only a few small things that were hardly worth cooking, and the *voyageurs* were so disappointed that they broke out into open discontent, protesting that they would proceed no farther unless more food was given them, their purpose evidently being to try and compel Lieut. Franklin to let them consume the meagre stock of soup and arrowroot and flour that he was reserving for future need.

But they miscalculated the strength and resolution of the man with whom they were dealing. He was not to be intimidated by any such proceedings, and spoke to them so sternly that they quailed before him.

Yet they refused to proceed unless supplied with food of some kind, alleging that they had not the strength to paddle the heavy canoes or to carry them and the goods over the portages, and, as they far outnumbered Lieut. Franklin and his associates, it was out of the question to use forcible measures to compel them to go forward.

Under these circumstances there seemed no alternative save to stay where they were until a supply of fish could be obtained, or word was received from the hunters of their having been successful in their search for reindeer.

The delay was most trying for Lieut. Franklin, but he chafed against it unavailingly, for the *voyageurs* were not to be moved.

It was therefore with intense anxiety that news was awaited from Denis, and when Mr. Hood announced that he saw some one crossing the summit of a hill in the distance, all four of the officers hastened off to meet the new-comer, in the hope that he might be Denis.

And Denis it proved to be: weary, footsore, well-nigh fainting, but full of joy, for he bore the good tidings that the hunters had fallen in with a herd of deer, and killed five of them. At word of this the *voyageurs* became new men. All their weakness vanished, and with prospect of abundant venison ahead they pressed on with such vigour that ere night they reached the hunters' camp.

Here they had a tremendous blow-out, each man eating until the Englishmen, who thought their appetites by no means moderate, looked on in wonder not unmixed with concern, lest some serious consequences should follow such a gorging.

But they need not have given themselves any anxiety. After a good smoke and a big sleep the *voyageurs* were so thoroughly invigorated that no more grumbling was heard from them, and the expedition pursued its way with steady speed until the place was reached where the Indians recommended the winter quarters should be established.

After a careful examination of the locality, Lieut. Franklin was satisfied that it possessed all the advantages they could desire.

The trees were numerous and of good size, some of the pines being forty feet high, and the site chosen for the house was on the summit of a bank which commanded a beautiful prospect of the surrounding country.

To the north rose a range of round-backed hills, to the east and west lay the Winter and Round Rock Lakes, connected by the Winter River, whose banks were well clothed with pines and ornamented with a profusion of moss, lichens, and shrubs. Here, then, five hundred and fifty miles from Fort Chipewyan, the expedition settled down to prepare for the long winter whose passing must be patiently awaited ere the journey north could be continued and completed.

The very appropriate name given the establishment by Lieut. Franklin was Fort Enterprise.

Of course, the first thing to do was to build a strong, solid, log house, that could be counted upon to keep out the piercing cold of midwinter.

All hands helped in this, and under Lieut. Franklin's competent directions Fort Enterprise rapidly took shape, and by the first week in October it was ready for occupation.

As there had been frost at night for some weeks past, the members of the expedition were only too glad to exchange the frail canvas tents in which they had been living for the substantial protection of the building.

It was a log house fifty feet long, twenty-four feet wide, divided into a hall, three bedrooms, and a kitchen. The walls and roof were plastered with clay, the floors laid with planks rudely squared with the hatchet, and the windows closed with parchment of deer-skin.

The clay, which, owing to the coldness of the weather, had to be tempered before the fire with hot water, unfortunately froze as it was being daubed on, and soon cracked so as to let the wind in on all sides, which was not at all pleasant; but even with this

drawback the building was a vast improvement upon the tents, and, having filled the capacious clay-built chimney with fagots, the whole party spent a cheerful evening before the inspiring blaze, Denis playing merrily on his little flute, the *voyageurs* singing their melodious songs, and Mr. Wentzel telling some capital stories of thrilling experiences through which he had passed during his twenty years' sojourn in the Far North.

In addition to the main building the *voyageurs* put up a smaller house for themselves, and a store-house was also erected, the three structures being so placed as to form the three sides of a square.

Nor was the hunting neglected while all the building was going on. The reindeer were now moving south from the barren grounds to where the lichens and mosses were more plentiful and easily got at, and they approached the neighbourhood of the fort in large herds.

One afternoon, when Lieut. Franklin had gone out for a walk with Denis, they saw one herd after another, until fully two thousand had thus been sighted.

'What a pity it is that we cannot confine a few hundred of them in some place where they could stay until we needed them for food!' said the lieutenant, whose kind heart was somewhat troubled at the lavish slaughter of the pretty creatures that was going on. 'It seems too bad to be killing them now, when we won't require the meat for months to come.'

But Denis did not share these sentimental views. In his eyes the reindeer had only one use, and that was to be killed for food, and he could not see one without itching to lay it low.

He had, indeed, done good service in this direction already, his trusty gun not wasting many bullets, and there was no member of the party to whom Lieut. Franklin more readily gave ammunition out of his fast-diminishing store.

One day the Englishmen had an opportunity of seeing how the Indians often manage to bag a number of deer without going far for them.

Word was brought of a large herd being on a small plain not far from the fort, and they all went off to the scene, the Englishmen remaining on the hill-top while the Indians advanced towards the herd.

The hunters went in pairs, the foremost man carrying in one hand the head of a deer, and in the other a small bundle of twigs, against which he from time to time rubbed the horns, imitating the actions peculiar to the animal.

Behind him was his comrade, treading exactly in his footsteps, and holding the guns of both in a horizontal position, so that the muzzles projected under the arms of the one carrying the head.

Both hunters had a fillet of white skin round their foreheads, and the foremost had the same thing around his wrists.

They approached the herd by degrees, raising their feet very slowly, but letting them down somewhat suddenly, after the manner of the deer, and always taking care to move them simultaneously.

If any of the herd grew suspicious and stopped feeding to scrutinize this strange creature, it instantly halted, and the head played its part by licking its shoulders, and otherwise imitated the real animal.

Thus proceeding warily the disguised Indians succeeded in reaching the very centre of the herd,

where they picked out the fattest bucks for their victims. The hindmost man then pushed forward his comrade's gun, and they fired at the same instant.

Two deer fell to the ground, and the rest scampered off in terror.

But they did not go far. Their curiosity got the better of their fears, and halting to wonder at what had alarmed them, they allowed the hunters to again draw near.

The second discharge of the guns threw them into great confusion, and they ran helplessly to and fro, allowing the Indians to fire again and again, until a great part of the herd had thus been brought down.

'Pah!' exclaimed Lieut. Franklin in manifest disgust. 'That's not hunting. It's mere butchery. I would not want to have a hand in that kind of work.'

'Nor me also,' said Denis, glad of an opportunity to express his contempt for Indian methods.

'But we need the meat, and we must get it at the cost of as little ammunition as possible,' continued the lieutenant, with a sigh of resignation, 'and there's certainly no waste of bullets or powder in that way.'

Indeed, the laying up of provision for the winter was going on prosperously, and ere long the storehouse was as full as it could hold of venison and suet, while scores of carcasses were put *en cache* not far away. There was therefore no fear of food running short for many months to come.

CHAPTER XV

DENIS'S ADVENTURE IN THE SNOWDRIFT

IN spite of the cold (which at times was so intense that the thermometer in Lieut. Franklin's bedroom more than once went as low as 40° below zero in the morning before the fires were lit, and rose no higher than 15° below when the blaze was at its hottest) and of many other discomforts and difficulties, such as the trees becoming frozen to their very centre and breaking the axes used upon them, so that it was difficult to get sufficient fuel, while the cracks between the logs of the house refused to stay closed up with clay or ice, and were continually giving admission to the biting wind—in spite of all these drawbacks, the long dreary winter slipped by more rapidly than would be imagined.

Lieut. Franklin and his brother officers found abundant employment in writing up their journals and attending to the scientific part of their work, the lieutenant recalculating the observations made on the route; Dr. Richardson examining the plants and minerals of the surrounding country; and Mr. Hood preparing charts of the journey, and making drawings of birds, plants, and fishes.

In the evening they all joined the men in the

hall and took part in their games, which generally continued until a late hour.

The Sabbath was always a day of rest. Everybody put on his best attire, and divine service was regularly performed, at which the *voyageurs* attended, behaving with great decorum, although they were all Roman Catholics, and but slightly acquainted with the language in which the prayers were read.

Denis found the time hang very heavy upon his hands, however, and therefore, when it was decided to send a party down to Fort Providence to bring up the stores forwarded there from Cumberland House, he urged his suit to be allowed to be a member of it with such earnestness that at last Lieut. Franklin was persuaded to consent.

‘You are certain to have a hard time of it, Denis,’ he said, ‘and perhaps be in danger of losing your life, for the cold will be awful, and there are sure to be storms.’

‘That is nothing, sir,’ responded Denis stoutly; ‘I am tired staying here, and I will be happy to go with them.’

And so it was settled that he should accompany Mr. Back and Mr. Wentzel, who were in charge of the party.

They took with them two of the *voyageurs*, viz. Beauparlant and Belanger, and two Indians, and set off on the long slow journey over the desolate wastes of snow with as light hearts as if it was only an autumn tramp they were taking.

Their provisions, bedding, and ammunition they had to drag upon toboggans themselves, for they had no dogs, and it spoke volumes as to Denis’s love of

change that he was willing to undertake such hard work in order to gratify it.

As it turned out, the trip was one of great hardship, and there were times when it seemed as if the chances were all against their ever reaching their destination.

Denis, indeed, came within an ace of paying forfeit with his life for having had his own way about joining the party.

Worn out with the hard work of hauling the heavy toboggans, they were taking a day's rest in a sheltered spot, and after dinner, Denis, who was wonderfully quick in recovering from fatigue, announced his intention of going out in quest of reindeer.

Their stock of meat was running low, and a fat buck would be a very welcome addition to it.

Mr. Back had no objections. Indeed, he would have gone himself, but that his feet were very sore. The Indians, however, refused to budge, shaking their heads and muttering something that seemed like a warning, at which Denis laughed contemptuously; so the lad went off with only the ever-faithful Koyee as his companion.

'Me not go far,' he said, smiling confidently, for he had little doubt of his success. 'Me get you nice deer steak for supper, sure,' and, shouldering his gun, he moved swiftly off over the snow, with Koyee bounding joyously about him.

He had gone about a mile from the camp when to his delight he discovered a small herd of deer in a hollow, of which he commanded a view from the hill-top on which he stood.

'Oh, *c'est bon!*' he exclaimed. 'Fine big buck there! Me get him sure.'

So saying, he swiftly slipped down and around the

hill, taking care not to let the deer get wind of him as he approached them, and keeping a tight hold upon Koyee, lest by rushing forward too soon he would frighten the animals away.

By careful stalking he got within fifty yards of the reindeer, and then had to stop, for he could not advance farther unseen.

Now was his time to fire, and, letting go his hold of Koyee, he was taking careful aim at the buck, when the dog, finding himself free, dashed suddenly forward, barking fiercely.

In an instant the deer, hitherto unsuspecting of danger, threw up their heads and darted off, with Koyee in futile, noisy chase. Just how Denis expressed his feelings need not be detailed. He had not been in the company of fur hunters and *voyageurs* all his life without picking up many of their hard words, and if a varied assortment of them now hurried to the tip of his tongue, it must at least be allowed that there were extenuating circumstances of no common order.

But, however vigorously he might express himself, it could have no effect upon either Koyee or the deer, and the only thing to be done was to continue in pursuit, hoping that the dog might bring the animals to bay somewhere. 'Ah, *mauvais chien*!' he grumbled, 'will I not beat you!' and halting just long enough to reload his gun, he hurried after the deer.

They did not go very far, for Koyee, who slipped over the snow like a shadow, while they had to plough through it, soon got in front and headed them off, whichever way they turned. The intelligent creature seemed thoroughly to understand what was best for him to do, and gave his whole attention to

the buck, harrying the big fellow into such a state of bewilderment that he ran round in a circle instead of keeping straight on.

This gave Denis the opportunity he needed, and labouring up, breathless but resolute, he sent a bullet into the buck's heart.

'Ah, *c'est cela!*' he cried triumphantly. 'Me got him now! Hurrah!' and in the rush of joy he quite forgot Koyee's misconduct, and, instead of beating him, gave him a good hugging, exclaiming: 'Good dog! good dog! Ah! but there is only one Koyee!'

The buck was a worthy prize, and Denis's thought now was to get back to camp as fast as possible and announce his good fortune, when he knew Mr. Back would send the Indians after the meat.

But, just as he was starting, there suddenly burst upon him one of those furious snow-storms which, in these regions, are so frequent at that time of year.

It was more like a sand-storm than a snow-storm, the flakes were so hard, and they stung Denis's face mercilessly, rendering it impossible for him to make headway against them.

He must seek shelter at once, and stay there until the storm subsided.

Glancing anxiously around, he saw a small bunch of pines not far off, and hastened towards it with a sinking heart, for the idea of being exposed to the fury of the storm without any protection, save the clothes on his back, filled him with dismay. Happily, he found a nook at the root of an overturned tree that afforded him considerable protection, and here, scraping away the snow, so as to make a kind of

hollow, he curled up in a little heap, with Koyee tightly clasped in his arms.

The dog would be almost as good as a fire for giving warmth, and if the storm did not last too long they would both survive it all right.

It was not many minutes since Denis had been relieving his feelings by the use of language that would scarce bear repetition, but now it was words of an entirely different character that moved his lips, for he murmured prayer after prayer to the Holy Virgin that she would remember him in his sore peril.

Right on up to nightfall the blinding snow came down, and Denis dared not stir from his shelter, in which, thanks to Koyee's welcome warmth, he managed somehow to keep himself from freezing, in spite of the merciless cold.

His courage kept up wonderfully until the night closed in around him, and then he gave way to despair.

'*Hélas*, poor Denis!' he moaned, clasping Koyee still tighter in his arms, for the dog's presence was his only comfort. 'I will be die for sure.'

Certainly the chances of his surviving the night were small indeed. In the confusion caused by the sudden storm he had completely lost his reckoning, and now had not the slightest idea in which direction the camp lay.

It was therefore of no use for him to set out in search of his companions, even though the snow had ceased to fall and the wind was going down. Yet to remain where he was could hardly fail to mean death. Already he felt the torpor stealing over him, the significance of which he thoroughly understood.

'Poor me! poor me!' he murmured, his voice growing fainter as his faculties became dulled.

Presently the fatal sleepiness that intense cold causes came upon him, and, hugging Koyee as closely as he could, he lapsed into unconsciousness.

In the meantime there had been keen concern at the camp for the young hunter. He had not been gone an hour before Mr. Back began to doubt his own wisdom in allowing him thus to go off alone, and when the snow-storm came on he sharply reproached himself for having done it.

But while the storm continued it would have been worse than folly to go out after Denis, and not until it was over and the moon shone out brightly did he call upon the *voyageurs* and Indians to join him in a search for the lad.

Then, stirred by his vigorous appeals, they set themselves to the task with all the energy he could wish.

Scattering over the country they left no likely spot unexamined, yet a couple of hours passed, and still no sign of Denis.

Then one of the Indians gave a whoop of triumph, for lying under the snow he had found the body, not of Denis, but of the reindeer, and he was proud of his success.

Happily, he made so much noise over it, in order to attract the attention of the others, that his shouts reached the sharp ears of Koyee, and, springing up from beside his unconscious master, he responded with his shrill barking, which Mr. Back at once recognized.

'Hurrah!' he exclaimed joyfully. 'That's Koyee! Denis can't be far off.'

Rushing forward to where Koyee stood wagging his tail energetically in delighted welcome, he found Denis, to all appearances sleeping the sleep of death.

'God help us, I hope we're not too late!' Mr. Back cried, as he sprang to Denis's side and sought to lift him up. 'Come here, and let us do all we can for him.'

Fortunately they were just in time. Although overcome by the cold, Denis was not frozen beyond the point of recovery, and after a course of vigorous shaking and chafing at the hands of his friends, the blood once more ran in full tide through his veins, and his power of thought returned.

The first use he made of his regained consciousness was to ask in a tone of acute concern :

'The big buck! I did kill him. Where is he?'

Mr. Back, relieved at his quick recovery and amused at the intensity of his hunting interest, clapped him enthusiastically on the back as he exclaimed :

'Denis, you are a trump ; there's no downing you ! The buck's all right. One of the Indians found him under the snow just before we found you.'

At the welcome news Denis gave a shout of joy, and clapped his hands.

'Good ! good ! good !' he cried. 'That fine big buck, for sure.' And so his gallant hunting venture turned out completely successful, albeit he felt some discomfort from his fight with the cold for a few days following.

Keeping on steadily day after day, Fort Providence was reached in good time ; but, to the sharp disappointment of Mr. Back, it was found that the stores belonging to the expedition had not been forwarded according to

arrangement, and that it would be necessary to continue the journey to Fort Chipewyan.

This was far more than he had bargained for at starting out, but he could not think of going back empty-handed. So after a rest and refitting at Fort Providence, the party set forth again, and accomplished the journey to Fort Chipewyan without mishap.

There a portion of their expected stores awaited them, and also two Esquimaux from the north of Hudson's Bay, who had been sent on to act as interpreters when the Franklin expedition should reach the Arctic regions, and come into contact with their inhabitants.

These men bore the strange names of Tattannoek (the belly) and Haeotoerock (the ear), which had been changed at Fort Churchill into the more euphonious designations of Augustus and Junius, in allusion to their having arrived at that establishment in the months of August and June respectively. Augustus, who was a very bright and prepossessing fellow, spoke English very well, but Junius could not, so that the former was by far the more valuable acquisition.

With heavy loads of powder, tobacco, rum, cloth, &c., and, what was hardly less precious, a big packet of letters and papers from the old homeland, Mr. Back and his party took up the long, toilsome, return journey, and after many days of hardship and exposure arrived at Fort Enterprise without losing a man or a pound of stores.

Lieut. Franklin received them actually with open arms, for he was so delighted at their safe arrival that he gave both the midshipman and Denis a hearty hug, exclaiming—

'God be thanked, you've done nobly! I'm proud of you both!'

The rest of the winter passed away without special incident, and with the approach of spring preparations for the continuance of the journey northward kept everybody occupied.

Owing to the tardiness of the season, it was not until the middle of June that a start could be made; and even then there was sufficient snow on the ground and ice in the streams and lakes to allow of the use of sledges for carrying the stores and the canoes that were to be used later on.

Fort Enterprise was left in solitude, the door being fastened, and having affixed to it a drawing representing a man holding a dagger in a very threatening attitude. This was done on the advice of Mr. Wentzel, who said the picture, rude as it was, would deter Indians from breaking in.

Being heavily laden, only slow progress was possible, and the variableness of the weather—the temperature rising to over 80° and falling below freezing-point within twenty-four hours, while high winds prevailed, and snow-squalls were frequent—made the toil of travel very arduous.

Yet the whole party continued in capital spirits, and steady if slow advance was made day after day.

In crossing Big Lake on the ice they had quite an exciting time of it, for in the first place they had to walk into the water up to their waists in order to get upon the ice, and then, after getting upon it, several of them, Lieut. Franklin, Mr. Back, and Junius among the number, broke through, and were extricated with difficulty.

The lake well deserved its name, and had large

arms branching from its main body in different directions. When the expedition came to these, they crossed the projecting points of land, and each time had to wade for some distance, which was terribly fatiguing, so that everybody rejoiced when at last they reached the shore of the lake and went into camp.

The hunters, who had gone on ahead, had killed a deer, so that there was plenty of meat, and the tired travellers enjoyed a good meal as well as much-needed rest.

For many days the course of events was varied only by the differing difficulties of the route. Now they would be traversing a lake whose still frozen surface had two feet of water upon it, and was full of holes, into which the men were continually slipping, in spite of their efforts to avoid them; and then they would be toiling up and down the rugged slope of a range of hills, or creeping along the course of a stream, not knowing when the treacherous ice would fail them altogether. Every step of the way they were beset by mosquitoes that bit them mercilessly, and drove Denis wellnigh out of his mind.

He had a particularly sensitive skin, and the venom of the winged pests at first had such an effect upon him as to make him positively ill.

Lieut. Franklin, noticing how little notice the Indians took of the mosquito bites, rallied him upon being so affected by them. 'Don't you wish you were an Indian yourself, Denis?' he asked him banteringly. 'Then you wouldn't mind the horrid little plagues so much.'

Denis's eyes flashed, and his cheeks reddened. Only his profound respect for Lieut. Franklin kept

him from giving an impertinent retort. Wish himself an Indian, indeed! He was more likely to wish himself a dog.

'No,' he replied emphatically. 'No, no; me not be Indian for anything. Much better be dead, me.'

'Ah, Denis! Denis!' laughed the lieutenant, who, however, could not help admiring the boy's pride and evident determination that the dark strain in his blood should be ignored, and only the French side of his ancestry taken into account. 'You must not be too hard upon the Indians. What would we do without them now?'

Yet, although he said this, Lieut. Franklin was beginning to feel concerned lest his Indian allies should prove but a poor dependence after all.

Akaitcho, the chief from whom much had been expected, was proving very disappointing. He seemed to have doubts as to Lieut. Franklin being what he claimed—doubts which were unhappily strengthened by the strange conduct of one of the Hudson Bay Company officials, who had spoken very sceptically concerning him, and sought to cast discredit upon his enterprise. At this very stage of the journey he had been counted upon to have a good supply of meat ready for the expedition when it should have come up with him, yet, to Lieut. Franklin's distress, he had done practically nothing, although he had expended all the ammunition supplied him at Fort Enterprise.

This was certainly most discouraging, and Lieut. Franklin, on meeting Akaitcho, expressed his disappointment in strong terms, whereupon the chief offered many excuses and promised to do better in future.

But after this experience Lieut. Franklin felt that he could not have any ease of mind concerning him again, and was much disposed to accept Denis's unfavourable opinion of all Indians. It was really too bad, seeing how largely the expedition must depend upon the Indian hunters for sustenance, yet there was nothing to be done save to bear with them patiently and hope for the best.

CHAPTER XVI

WOLVES, RAPIDS, AND MUSK-OXEN

IT was nearly the end of spring ere the expedition reached Winter Lake, and yet while encamped there they were delayed by a heavy fall of snow followed by sleet and rain.

When they were able to take up their route they found the ice on the lake still firm enough to bear them, and so chose it, instead of going overland.

The three canoes were mounted upon sledges, and nine men were appointed to look after them, having the help of two dogs to each canoe.

The stores and provisions were then distributed equally amongst the rest of the men, except a few small articles which the Indians carried.

In the way of provisions there were only two small bags of pemmican, two of pounded meat, five of suet, and about enough fresh meat for supper, a pitifully scant supply for such a party, setting forth upon so long and laborious a journey, and yet there was no murmuring nor holding back. Relying upon the country to supply them with food as they went along, they toiled away cheerfully at their heavy loads. Yet, owing to the heavy wet snow which lay upon the ice, it was very slow going, and not more than six miles had been accomplished by nightfall, and then the whole party was much fatigued, and several members of it were troubled with swollen and inflamed legs, that boded ill for the future.

The following day was extremely hot, and told upon the men severely. Their lameness increased very much, and some not previously affected began to complain. The dogs, too, showed signs of exhaustion, and one of them lay down upon the ice refusing to budge, so that he had to be released from the harness.

Under these circumstances Lieut. Franklin made a short day of it, going into camp when only four miles had been travelled.

‘I am becoming deeply concerned about the condition of our men,’ he said to his brother officers, as they took counsel together in the evening. ‘If they break down like this so soon, the prospects of our reaching the sea are poor indeed. I never expected them to feel the toils of the journey so much. They are trying enough, to be sure, but I thought the *voyageurs* would be equal to anything we would require of them.’

‘It’s a great surprise and disappointment to me, too,’ said Dr. Richardson. ‘They do not seem to be able to stand as much as we can. Even Denis holds out better than the most of them. Can we do anything to lighten their burdens?’

‘I have been thinking of that,’ replied Lieut. Franklin, ‘and have come to the conclusion to leave one of our canoes here. We will not really need it when we do come to the Coppermine River, and we can distribute the weight much better if we leave it.’

This idea was approved by the others and acted upon at once, the canoe being placed upon a stage erected for the purpose and carefully covered, so that it might be used upon the return journey if necessary.

By this move three men were released to share the loads of those who were lame, and a dog was added to the sledges of the other two canoes, the result of this assistance being that nearly nine miles were made the next day.

But the day following they came upon ice that was much honeycombed by the recent rains, and presented innumerable sharp points, which tore their shoes and lacerated their feet at every step, rendering their progress painful in the extreme, while the poor dogs marked their path with blood.

In spite of all their difficulties and drawbacks, however, the expedition crawled onward, and at last on July 1 reached the long and eagerly looked-for Coppermine River, where it flowed past the remarkable rock called by the Indians Rock-nest.

In their joy at reaching the river they forgot their weariness and sufferings, and Akaitcho and his Indians having had the good fortune to kill a couple of deer, there was meat in plenty for all, and they felt all very cheerful; Denis added to the hilarity of the occasion by a lively performance upon his piccolo, which was highly appreciated.

Although he would have bitten his tongue off rather than admit it, the truth was he had grown pretty well tired of the expedition, and would have hailed with delight the decree to turn about and retrace their steps.

Lieut. Franklin was not unobservant of this, and, thinking the diversion would be good for the lad, said to him:

‘Denis, you’re getting sick of this wearisome business, I know. How would you like to go off with Akaitcho for a few days, and try your luck at

hunting? Could you endure the sole society of Indians for the sake of having a little variety?’

Denis looked up at the lieutenant with a demure smile. He quite realized that to accept the offer would be to expose himself to chaff, in view of his freely expressed dislike for the Redskins, but at the same time his passion for hunting was too strong to allow such a little thing as that to stand in the way of its indulgence.

‘Oh, that’s all right,’ he responded. ‘Indians good for hunting. Me help them. Fine!’

‘You conceited young fellow,’ laughed the lieutenant. ‘I really believe you think yourself in no wise inferior to Akaitcho himself in the matter of hunting. Well, we’ll see. You can go with the Indians for a few days, and see what you can do.’

‘*Merci, bien!*’ cried Denis, springing up into the air and bringing his feet together with a sharp smack, after a peculiar way that he had. ‘You are very good. *Allons*, Koyee, we shall get some deer, eh?’

Well supplied with ammunition, Denis joined the hunters, and they went on ten miles or more ahead of the slow-moving expedition, but keeping within reach of the Coppermine River, whose course the whole party was now following to the sea.

It was quite a picturesque country through which they passed, the hills shelving to the river banks and being well covered with wood, while the surface of the rocks was richly ornamented with lichens.

Denis attached himself to Akaitcho, no other company than that of the chieftain being good enough for him, and the great man, being quite ignorant of his companion’s feelings towards his race, made himself very agreeable.

Having reached a locality that Akaitcho pronounced good for reindeer, they struck into the country, keeping a sharp look-out for their quarry and allowing Koyee to range freely, so that nothing might be missed.

Late that afternoon they sighted a fine herd of deer, and after some careful stalking which took much time, succeeded in securing three good fat fellows, with which they were content. It was too late to get back to their own camp that night, so, after cutting up the deer, they prepared to stay where they were until morning.

But if, after the exertions of the day, which had indeed been pretty severe, they expected to have a quiet night's rest, they were doomed to disappointment.

Attracted no doubt by the scent of blood, a large pack of wolves appeared—big grey timber-wolves, whose ravenous appetites rendered them very bold, and who seemed as determined to possess themselves of the meat as Akaitcho and Denis were determined to defend it.

The meat had been cached a little to one side of the camp, and with a daring strategy that showed surprising sagacity the wolves sought to get in between the hunters and the venison. In so doing of course they exposed themselves fully to the fire of the guns, and at the first volley two of the leaders fell shot through the heart.

But this, instead of scaring the others, only served to render them more reckless, and they turned so fiercely upon their two assailants that the latter were forced to fall back, and take refuge upon the top of a rock that fortunately was at hand. Here they were comparatively safe, but that did not satisfy them.

They could not tamely submit to being despoiled of their hard-won game, and so they reloaded as rapidly as possible, and again fired into the huddle of restless grey forms.

This time, however, they could not aim so well, and as a consequence they wounded, but did not kill, those their bullets hit. The pain of their wounds enraged the brutes so that, forgetting the meat, they gave their whole attention to the men, springing furiously up at them with frantic gnashing of teeth and horrid growling.

Akaitcho had not time to reload, but clubbing his gun, smote the maddened animals with the heavy butt, hurling them backward every time they sprang up.

Unfortunately, in making an extra effort of the kind he lost his footing, and, after a vain attempt to recover his balance, in which his gun slipped from his hands, he pitched forward right among the leaping, howling, gnashing animals.

He gave a yell of terror as he fell, which Denis echoed, and this, combined with the suddenness of his fall, served to produce a momentary panic among the wolves; but it was only for a moment, and they would have been upon him the next instant, had not Denis, giving a whoop worthy of the Indians from whom he had learned it, leapt down from the rock, and, firing his gun in the face of the nearest wolf, seized the barrel in both hands and swung the butt around in a half-circle, banging the brutes so mightily that, furious as they were, they were compelled to give way.

'Get up quick, quick!' he cried to Akaitcho, who had fallen so heavily as to be slightly stunned; and, picking himself up, the big Indian regained his position on the rock, where Denis instantly joined him.

By this time the wolves were beginning to realize that they were getting the worst of the struggle. Three of their number had been killed outright, and three more placed *hors de combat* by blows from the gun-butts, and so when, having loaded again, Akaitcho and Denis, aiming carefully, dispatched two more of the brutes, the remainder took themselves off to a safe distance, where they howled in futile rage and chagrin for the rest of the night.

Thus the brave hunters succeeded in saving not only their own skins, but the supply of meat which was so greatly needed by the expedition; and when the following day Denis told Lieut. Franklin the whole story, the latter's face glowed with pride and pleasure in his *protégé*, as he said warmly:

'Denis, you proved yourself nothing short of a hero. I wish I had been there to see you. But I'm particularly glad that it was Akaitcho whose life you saved; for, unless he's a monster of ingratitude, he should never forget, and it's in his power to be of very great service to us.'

It was the second day of July when, after their toilsome tugging over ice and land, the canoes were at last launched in the swift current of the Coppermine River.

As they started Lieut. Franklin called for a round of cheers, in which all heartily joined. If powder had not been so scarce, they would have fired a *feu de joie*, but they had to content themselves with such noises as they could furnish from their own throats.

Their first experience was a succession of strong rapids, through which the canoes were carried with extraordinary rapidity, shooting over large stones, a single touch of which would have smashed the frail structures.

The canoes were also in danger from lack of the long poles which should lie along their bottoms and equalize their cargoes, as in plunging through the waves they were liable to break their backs.

The scenery on either hand was beautiful, consisting of gentle elevations and dales wooded to the water's edge, and flanked by a range of round-backed hills several hundred feet in height.

At the foot of the rapids the high lands receded to a greater distance, and the river flowed with a more gentle current in a wider channel, through a level, open country.

Under the increasing warmth of the sun vegetation was making rapid progress, the trees putting forth their leaves, and flowers ornamenting the moss-covered ground, while the summer birds began to sing in the woods, and flocks of ducks, gulls, and plover made their appearance in the river.

All this helped to hearten the members of the expedition, and they pressed on actively, making good progress down the river that was leading them to the Arctic Ocean.

As the rapids were numerous, and many of them very dangerous, Lieut. Franklin, who, brave as he was, never assumed a needless risk, gave orders that no rapid should be run by the canoes until one of the *voyageurs* had first gone on ahead and examined its character; and, furthermore, that whenever the rapids were particularly lively all the guns, ammunition, instruments, and stores that would be damaged by wetting, should be carried over the land to the foot of the rapid.

The wisdom of this arrangement was not long in being strikingly illustrated, for at one of the rapids

through which the first canoe passed in safety, the second one, containing Lieut. Franklin and Dr. Richardson, being not so skilfully managed, was dashed upon a rock in the very middle of the rapid, and so badly stove in that it filled at once and capsized, throwing its occupants into the tumultuous water.

Had it been a mere matter of swimming ashore, none of those thus unceremoniously dumped out would have been in any danger, for they were all strong, expert swimmers.

But they had been upset just where the rapid raged most fiercely between and over a thick-set throng of rocks and boulders, that gave little chance to the swimmer fighting for his life.

Several of those who had gone by land to carry the stores, &c., saw the accident, and by loud shouts sought to encourage and direct the struggling men.

But that was all they could do. They were powerless to offer a helping hand, nor could they throw anything to them that would serve as a lifebuoy.

Again and again both Lieut. Franklin and Dr. Richardson vanished in the foaming whirls, and it seemed as if they must be gone for good.

Yet they reappeared, still bravely fighting with the pitiless water that would claim them for its victims, and kept on down the rapid, more than once escaping being dashed against a boulder by what seemed little short of a miracle.

Denis, who had gone down in the first canoe, hearing the shouts of the *voyageurs* ashore, hurried back to see what was the matter, and when he took in the situation cried out with horrified apprehension—

‘Oh, see! They will be drown for sure! What will we do? What will we do?’

And, futile though it would have been, he would have assuredly leaped into the water after his beloved chief, had not Mr. Hood held him back, saying—

‘No use, Denis, you could not help them. God grant they’ll pull through all right!’

It was certainly hard to be a passive spectator of so thrilling a struggle; but there was nothing to be done, and in breathless anxiety they watched the strong men battling with the yet stronger torrent.

Had the rapids continued for many yards farther than they did, the issue of the matter must have been calamitous; but, happily, just before the two Englishmen, worn out by their tremendous effort, reached the point of utter exhaustion, they shot through a steep slide into a deep eddy, whence Mr. Hood and Denis were able to draw them out ere they sank in the whirling flood.

As for the two *voyageurs*, their previous experience of such situations enabled them to put their strength to better purpose, and they both succeeded in extricating themselves from the power of the rapid unhurt.

The canoe went through without further injury, and was caught at the foot of the rapid, not so badly broken but that the *voyageurs* could repair it in a couple of hours. Altogether it was a very fortunate escape, for which Lieut. Franklin and his fellow sufferers felt profoundly grateful.

‘And was it not well that I had the things portaged across?’ the former exclaimed; ‘otherwise our loss would have been irreparable. I shall not fail to observe the same precaution in future.’

This entailed more work, of course; but now every one saw how wise it was, and there was no grumbling about it.

After the fierce rapid which had so nearly proved fatal to the two most important members of the expedition, the river widened out and ran smoothly though swiftly over a gravelly bottom, and the canoes glided along at the rate of twenty-five miles per day, which was very gratifying.

Not less cheering was the announcement made by Akaitcho that they were coming to the region where musk-oxen were to be found, and meat, which had been scarce of late, would soon be plentiful again.

It was not long before the chief's prediction was fulfilled, one of the Indians coming into camp at nightfall in quite a state of excitement, to report that he had sighted a large herd of musk-oxen on the barren ground a mile inland.

On hearing this Lieut. Franklin at once decided to halt for a day or more to lay in a supply of meat, and the word was passed that everybody who wished might join in the hunt on the morrow. This permission was hailed with joy, and there was a general cleaning of guns and sharpening of arrows, and other preparations for the grand battle against the musk-oxen.

Immediately after a hasty breakfast all the men of the party set forth, leaving the women in charge of the camp.

They were all in high spirits, for they would enjoy the excitement of the chase no less than the respite from the labours of paddle and portage, and they joked and laughed, and sang and shouted, as they made their way towards the plains.

There was no need for being particularly quiet or cautious, as the musk-oxen are less wary than most

other wild animals, and are easily approached, provided the hunters go against the wind.

Yet, as soon as the party had come upon the barren ground, Lieut. Franklin gave orders that they should advance in perfect silence; for he was anxious that they should not fail of securing a good many of the animals, whose meat, in spite of the strong, disagreeable, musky flavour, would be so welcome an addition to their larder.

They had gone about a mile from the river ere the musk-oxen were sighted, and then it was Akaitcho who had the satisfaction of first reporting them.

On his signals being understood, the whole party would have rushed forward pell-mell, had not Lieut. Franklin restrained them.

‘No, no,’ he said; ‘let us make sure of a good day’s work. You,’ addressing Dr. Richardson, ‘take half the men and go to the right, and I will take the other half and go to the left, and then we may be able to surround the herd.’

They accordingly divided into two bands, which then spread out so as to cover a wide area and so come upon the herd, which they found in a sort of shallow depression where the moss upon which they fed was especially thick.

So cautiously did the hunters approach, that the report of the death-dealing guns was the first intimation the poor musk-oxen had of their proximity.

The volley brought down four and wounded several more, one of whom, an old bull, who looked very fierce with his shaggy mane and massive horns, caught sight of Lieut. Franklin as he stood reloading his gun, and instantly charged upon him like a thunderbolt.

CHAPTER XVII

CANOEING IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN

SO sudden and swift had been the charge of the musk-ox, that Lieut. Franklin, who was engrossed in the operation of reloading, did not observe the approaching danger until Denis, whose sharp eyes missed nothing, shouted to him frantically, '*Prenez garde ! Mon Dieu ! Prenez garde !*'

Lieut. Franklin, looking up, perceived his peril, and his gun not being ready yet to fire again, let it fall to the ground, while he strove to evade the bull's rush by a quick turn to the right.

But, as luck would have it, his foot sank in a hole concealed by the moss, and, instead of springing lightly aside as had been his intention, he tripped up and fell flat on his face, right in front of the infuriated creature, which bounded over him, striking him between the shoulders with its fore-feet, and giving the back of his head a hard bump with its nose as it passed.

Fully realizing that with so agile and powerful an animal in close proximity he was much safer in his prostrate position than standing upright, Lieut. Franklin lay still, wondering whether he would come in for any more hard knocks.

But from this Koyee cleverly saved him.

Denis sent him at the bull, and the courageous dog made straight for the creature's muzzle, which he seized in his sharp teeth and held on to it bravely, thus completely bewildering the bull and giving Dr. Richardson time to send a well-aimed bullet to its heart.

As soon as he saw that the danger was over, Lieut. Franklin sprang to his feet, laughing as he felt the places where the musk-ox had hit him with hoofs and head, and saying:

'Rather a rough introduction to the musk-oxen, eh, doctor? That fellow evidently wanted to make an impression on me, and he has tolerably well succeeded in doing it.'

But the bruises went for little, in view of the fine supply of meat which had been secured—a quantity so large that all had to help in taking it back to the encampment, where a large portion of it was dried for future use.

The descent of the Coppermine River was now continued steadily and rapidly day after day, the canoes at one time having to be guided through narrow and crooked cañons whose gloomy walls towered six hundred feet above them, and again, paddled across wide smooth stretches, where the river seemed almost to lose itself among broad sandy plains broken by small conical dunes.

By the middle of July they reached the region known to be inhabited by Esquimaux, and a sharp look-out was kept for them, the Indians being commanded to keep in the rear until Lieut. Franklin, through the two Esquimaux interpreters, Augustus and Junius, should have succeeded in winning their confidence.

There was some difficulty in accomplishing this, the native Esquimaux being extremely shy and wary ; but at last through the good offices of the two interpreters they were coaxed into a conference, and after being assured of the entire goodwill of the expedition, and given some presents, they promised to give a supply of dried meat (which, however, turned out to be too putrid for use) and to cache more against the time of the return of the travellers.

On the following day the expedition reached the salt water, and another step in its great undertaking was successfully accomplished. Since leaving Fort Enterprise they had travelled about three hundred and thirty-five miles, the canoes and baggage having been laboriously dragged over snow and ice for one hundred and seventeen miles of the distance.

Here Mr. Wentzel, as had been arranged, turned back, taking with him four of the *voyageurs*, and carrying a box containing a copy of the journals thus far, and dispatches prepared by Lieut. Franklin, setting forth the proceedings and observations of the expedition up to then, and the plans for the future.

The box was to be taken to his own post at Slave Lake, and forwarded thence to Hudson's Bay, so that it might go by the first packet to England.

When Mr. Wentzel and his party had left, there remained twenty men in all, quite as many as the two canoes could safely carry, and with this small party and an imperfect equipment Lieut. Franklin pressed dauntlessly forward to the navigation of the Arctic Ocean !

Before Mr. Wentzel started, Lieut. Franklin asked Denis if he would not like to go back with him to Fort Providence, and there await the return of the

expedition, thus escaping the inevitable perils and hardships of the voyage along the coast ; but Denis fairly scorned the idea.

‘No no !’ he exclaimed, quite indignantly. ‘Me go with you for sure. Me not afraid of the sea—not at all.’

Very well pleased at his resolution, for he did not by any means wish to lose his cheery young companion, and had made the offer only out of a sense of duty, the lieutenant said :

‘All right, Denis ; as you say. I just wanted to give you the chance to go back if you liked, but I’m only too glad to have you stay with us.’

It was noon of the twenty-first day of July when the two canoes ventured forth upon the Hyperborean Sea, whose waters had hitherto been navigated by only two other Europeans—namely, Alexander Mackenzie and Captain Perry.

During the afternoon a landing was made upon an island where the Esquimaux had a storehouse built of driftwood, in which were many of their fishing implements and winter sledges, together with a large number of dressed seal, musk-ox, and deer skins.

The owners were not visible, being no doubt on the mainland hunting musk-oxen, and the eyes of the *voyageurs* glistened with greed at the sight of so much desirable property thus left unprotected.

But Lieut. Franklin quickly dispelled the hopes of plunder. ‘Let nothing be touched,’ said he, in a tone of stern command that brooked no argument. ‘These things are sacred, unless there be anything we require for our immediate necessities, and that we will pay for properly.’

There were some sealskins urgently needed to

repair the foot-gear of the party, so several of these were taken, a copper kettle, some awls, and beads being left in payment.

Denis thought so honourable a proceeding rather superfluous. If the Esquimaux had chanced upon their camp in a similar condition, they would assuredly have robbed it of everything they thought worth taking, and he did not quite see why they did not do the same.

The fact was the Englishmen's high standard of honour, while it did not fail to evoke his admiration, puzzled him not a little. Having lived all his life in a region where might made right, and each man was a law unto himself to the extent of his power, the actions of the officers sometimes seemed to savour of weakness, just because they forbore to take advantage of their fellows when the game, so to speak, was in their own hands.

But Denis was learning. The elevating influence of close companionship with four such high-souled men was working upon him, and their way of looking at things would in due time become perfectly intelligible to him.

They paddled all day along the coast eastward, on the inside of a crowded range of islands, seeing very little ice, although the 'blink' of it was visible to the northward, and one small iceberg was sighted at a distance.

In the afternoon they saw some deer on an island, and St. Germain, one of the *voyageurs*, succeeded in securing a fine fat buck, which was a great acquisition.

Twenty-seven miles were run that day, and they went into camp in high spirits.

The canoes had been fitted with masts and sails,

and they went along finely when the wind was astern, although of course they could not do much in the way of tacking.

For several days equally good progress was made, the coast becoming more sterile and inhospitable the farther they went. It was simply a succession of trap cliffs, whose débris covered the narrow intervening valleys, excluding every kind of herbage, and rendering the landscape desolate and dreary in the extreme.

The twenty-fifth of July was a day full of danger and excitement. There had been rain with thunder during the night, and shortly after they embarked, paddling against a chilling breeze, a thick fog came up, compelling them to land.

They remained on shore until noon, when, as the wind had changed into a favourable quarter, they were tempted to proceed, although the fog had not abated.

They kept as close as they could to the main shore, but, having to cross some bays, they were in doubt whether they had not left the main, and were hugging an island.

Just as they were endeavouring to double a bold cape, the fog partially cleared away, revealing a chain of islands on the outside, and much heavy ice pressing down menacingly upon them.

‘Hallo!’ exclaimed Lieut. Franklin, looking very much concerned, ‘we’re in an awkward box, certainly. Yet we cannot do better than push on. We may find clear water ahead.’

They were in an awkward box indeed, for the coast was so steep and rugged that no landing of the canoes could be ventured upon, while the ice was crowding in so roughly against the frail craft that they could be

saved from being crushed only by the men jumping on the rocks and fending off the floes with poles.

To make matters still worse, the ice began to be tossed about by the waves which the wind had raised, and the great jagged cakes would charge at the canoes as though they were possessed of intelligent life.

It was indeed a critical time, and the only words interchanged by the men thus gallantly struggling against the combined attack of wind and wave and ice were brief directions and cries of warning, as they all strove to do their best to ward off the ever-threatening peril.

Again and again it seemed as if some great cake of ice must drive its jagged edges into the side of a canoe and crush it as though it were tissue paper, and yet, thanks to the wonderful adroitness of the *voyageurs*, who, poles in hand, leaped from rock to rock, or balanced skilfully at bow or stern, the menacing floe would be pushed back or turned cleverly aside, and the canoe slip through unscathed.

For several hours the thrilling struggle continued ; then at last, to their unutterable relief, the daring navigators turned the cape and got into clear water on the other side.

They had further trouble with the ice on the following day, and were compelled to halt awhile in a sheltered cove, which Lieut. Franklin appropriately named Detention Harbour.

Here several of the men went out hunting ; but although they saw some deer and fired at them, they got nothing for their pains.

This was particularly unfortunate, as it had just been discovered that two of the bags of pemmican,

upon which the expedition principally relied for food, had become mouldy by wet, and that the beef had been so badly cured as to be scarcely eatable.

In view of the difficulty of obtaining any addition to their supply of provisions—for beside the deer they had seen no animals save a few seals, and these they could not get within range of—this spoiling of their meat store was a very serious matter; but Lieut. Franklin put a cheerful face upon it, saying:

‘Never mind, my men. We’ll find a better country ahead, and deer in plenty. Let us push on, trusting in Providence to supply our needs.’

Nor was his faith without foundation, for, starting again as soon as the ice permitted, they came to a place which seemed favourable for deer, and a number of the men were sent off to hunt.

Of course, Denis did not fail to go, and it chanced that to him befell quite an exciting adventure.

The Indian hunters who had turned back with Mr. Wentzel had talked a great deal about the bears that were to be met in this region. They gave alarming accounts of their strength and ferocity. Indeed, only the great grizzly of the Rocky Mountains could fit the picture they drew of them.

The Englishmen accordingly had been very anxious to encounter one of these bears, and to judge for themselves whether they were really as terrible creatures as the Indians sought to make out.

Oddly enough, too, Lieut. Franklin, who remained in camp to work out some observations and write up his journal, said jocularly to Denis, as the latter was setting out, with Koyee at his heels:

‘Take care of yourself now, my boy, and if you happen to encounter one of those dreadful bears that

Akaitcho and his men talked so much about, be sure and give it a wide berth.'

Denis smiled in a way that signified he had not much expectation of meeting any bears. As a matter of fact, he had put no faith whatever in the Indians' stories, believing them to be pure fiction, made up for the purpose of deterring the expedition from proceeding.

'Oh yes; me take care of meself for 'sure,' he responded. 'Me want deer, not bear, this time.'

He set off alone, preferring Koyee's company to that of any of the *voyageurs*, and made straight inland, while the others went to east and west along shore.

He had gone about a mile when he sighted a small herd of deer, and set about carefully stalking it. His supply of ammunition was limited, and he could not afford to waste a single shot.

The deer were several hundred yards away, and in order not to let them get wind of him, it was necessary for him to make a wide detour.

In doing this he had to cross a sort of ravine, not very deep, but having steep, rocky sides.

When Koyee got into this place, instead of hurrying out again he stopped short, sniffed in a suspicious way, and then set up a strange whine, that revealed the presence of danger of some sort.

'What's the matter, Koyee?' asked Denis, in a low voice, while an unaccountable thrill of terror struck through him, and he glanced this way and that, in search of what had so startled the dog.

The next moment the matter was clear, for a harsh, deep growl came from a kind of cave in the cliff to the right of him, whence issued immediately after it the shaggy form of a bear, not a white polar bear, but

a big fellow of a yellowish-brown colour, whose lean condition showed that for some reason or other he had not been faring well of late.

Instead of displaying his wonted courage and springing at the animal with sharp, menacing barks, Koyee, strange to say, showed the white feather, and slunk back behind his young master, leaving it to him to bear the brunt of the attack.

‘Forward, Koyee, forward!’ Denis cried indignantly giving the dog a shove with his foot.

But, instead of obeying, Koyee only retreated farther, and, much disgusted at his conduct, Denis began to consider what he should do himself.

Bruin was evidently minded to get to close quarters, yet moved slowly forward to the attack; and Denis had time to clamber out of the ravine, if he had seen fit to show the same spirit as his dog.

This, however, he did not propose to do. Not only for the sake of the glory of the thing, but of the food the bear would furnish, it was very important that he should be killed; and even though Koyee, whose help would be so valuable, had thus basely and inexplicably failed him, he was not going to let the bear go scatheless.

At first he thought of scrambling up the side of the ravine, reserving his fire until he had reached the surface; but the next moment he changed his mind, for bruin was so close at hand that he would certainly overtake him ere he could reach the top of the cliff.

Taking careful aim, therefore, at the creature’s breast, he sent a bullet into it that he thought would reach the heart.

But just as he drew trigger, bruin lurched forward,

and the ball, instead of going where it was intended, hit him on the head, ploughing along from his snout to the ear, and partially stunning him, while the blood poured into his eyes, blinding him completely for a moment.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Denis made haste to get out of the ravine, and had about reached the top when a treacherous ledge crumbled away under his feet, and down he slipped, right to the bottom of the ravine again, barking his shins and scraping his hands in the descent, and also losing his gun, which rolled out of his reach.

On reaching the bottom and picking himself up, he found the bear just beside him, and ready for the fray! There was no room for escape, nor time for thought as to what was to be done.

Involuntarily his right hand went to his hunting-knife, and, whipping this out, he struck fiercely at the bear, now risen upon his hind legs, and extending his fore-paws to seize him.

Once more his remarkable good fortune attended him. It was not a carefully aimed thrust. Indeed, he made it rather blindly, being a good deal shaken by his fall; yet the keen blade went straight to the bear's throat, severing both windpipe and jugular vein, and turning in an instant what had been a living creature full of murderous rage into an inert, harmless heap of blood-stained fur.

'My word!' Denis exclaimed, with a huge sigh of relief, as he rubbed his barked shins and surveyed his victim. 'But that was hard work. But me kill him good. Oh, but that's fine! What will Monsieur Franklin say when I tell him I kill big bear all by meself?'

Swelling with pride, Denis hastened back to camp, and exultantly announced the result of his hunting.

At first, Lieut. Franklin was genuinely incredulous.

‘Oh, come now, Denis,’ he said, ‘you’re just trying to fool us. You killed a big marmot or something of that kind, and you want us to believe it was a bear.’

Pretending to be hurt at this questioning of his veracity, Denis challenged them to go with him and see for themselves, which the four Englishmen did; and when they came to the bear, and saw what a big, powerful animal he was, they gave the young hunter hearty praise for having vanquished him.

The other hunters had got a couple of deer, but the bear’s flesh was not to be despised, all the same. So the best of it was carried back to camp.

Continuing their venturesome voyage, in spite of baffling winds and obstructing ice, the expedition passed Stockport and Marcet Islands, and rounded Point Kater into Arctic Sound, along whose shore the canoes picked their way, until rounding Point Wollaston they opened out another extensive sheet of water, across which they made a traverse, and landed on a small island, where some firewood was to be found.

Here they were detained for a couple of days by a heavy gale attended with rain, which overthrew their tents and caused great discomfort; but as soon as the weather cleared they again set out, and kept on for several days without check, making from thirty to forty miles’ advance each day.

On reaching Gordon’s Bay they found their stock of provisions reduced to two bags of pemmican, and the *voyageurs* began to protest against proceeding

farther, saying they feared an entire failure of food, as the deer were quitting the coast for the season.

Their apprehension certainly was not groundless ; for, although the hunters went out at every landing, the only animal seen for some days past had been one musk-ox, which Junius, the Esquimaux interpreter, had been lucky enough to bring down.

Yet Lieut. Franklin was very reluctant to turn back, and set himself earnestly to overcoming their objections, finally promising them that if they failed to obtain an addition to their supply of meat within the next twenty-four hours, he would consent to go no farther.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE HANDS OF THE ESQUIMAUX

HAVING given his men this pledge, and yet being desirous of proceeding much farther eastward than he had succeeded in doing, Lieut. Franklin was extremely anxious that some addition to their scanty store of meat should be secured, and it was therefore with no ordinary feelings of joy that he himself discovered a bear on the opposite shore.

One of the canoes was immediately dispatched in pursuit of it, and it was killed with little difficulty. Being in fine condition, it furnished excellent eating; and the Canadians, who were particularly fond of fat meat, were put into such good humour again that they made no objections to continuing the voyage.

For several days they kept on, making good progress under sail and paddle; more than once narrowly escaping the destruction of the canoes through running against sunken rocks, or being caught in heavy swells that racked the frail structures unmercifully.

In Melville Sound they had a very rough time of it, and on examining the canoes after making a landing, it was found that no less than fifteen ribs of the first canoe were broken, some of them in two places, and that the second canoe was so loose in the frame that its

timbers could not be bound in the usual secure manner, and consequently there was danger of its bark sides separating from the gunwale in a heavy sea.

This was certainly a serious state of affairs, and Lieut. Franklin at last began to waver in his resolution to proceed further.

He was the more moved to this by the knowledge that the *voyageurs* who had hitherto, in following him through dangers and difficulties no less novel than appalling to them, displayed a courage and fortitude beyond expectation, had become possessed with gloomy apprehensions for their safety, which they did not hesitate to openly express.

Denis had already given him some idea of their feelings, and now, actuated more by affectionate concern for his chief than anxiety for his own safety, he ventured to act as the spokesman of the Canadians with regard to the future of the expedition.

‘They not want to go more far, the *voyageurs*,’ he said, in an earnest yet nervous way. ‘They say no more deer; nothing to eat; we all starve. Canoes—they be smashed. No good for water. So better go back, for winter come soon.’

It was a succinct and by no means overdrawn statement of the position of affairs, and Lieut. Franklin was too just and wise a man to resent it.

‘What they say is very true, Denis. We are meeting with more difficulties and greater hardships than I expected. Tell the men to all come here, and I will speak to them.’

The Canadians quickly gathered, and then Lieut. Franklin opened his mind to them.

He told them once more of his purposes and plans, and how his hope had been to find out a North-west

passage through the Arctic Ocean, and a safe harbour where ships might come with goods, and trade with the Esquimaux and Indians.

He confessed that he had been much disappointed at what had been accomplished, and that he now saw that he had not made sufficient preparations for such an enterprise; but he entreated them to stand by him yet a little longer, promising to turn back after four days' further exploring, unless they should meet the Esquimaux and be able to arrange to pass the winter with them.

This declaration was joyfully received by the men, who in return promised that they would make no more complaints.

The canoes having been repaired, the voyage was accordingly continued across Walker's Bay, past the Porden Islands, and around Cape Flinders, into a large expanse of water almost entirely free from islands, which was too wide to cross; the course was therefore continued along the coast, until a threatening change in the wind induced Lieut. Franklin to land for the night.

Hardly had the tents been pitched when they were assailed by heavy squalls accompanied with rain, which overset them three times before morning, so that their occupants had little chance to rest.

Before setting out the next morning, Junius, the Esquimaux interpreter, who had climbed a hill behind the camp, came running back in a high state of excitement, to report that he had seen a settlement of his people not far to the eastward.

This was a very welcome announcement, and threw the camp into great excitement. For several days past traces of the Esquimaux had been seen, but

nothing of the people themselves, and Lieut. Franklin was delighted at coming upon them at last.

Hurrying into their canoes, therefore, the expedition paddled around the cape into the bay, which was about six miles wide, and steered straight towards the Esquimaux tents, with the British flag flying at their masthead.

The water became so shallow as they neared the beach that Lieut. Franklin thought it best not to land, as this would have necessitated dragging the canoes some distance.

‘Our best plan,’ he said, ‘will be to stay out here until we get an idea of how they are going to treat us, for if we go ashore we shall be entirely at their mercy ;’ and the wisdom of this arrangement was not long in proving itself.

They shouted and made signs to the Esquimaux to come off, in response to which invitation came first three kayaks, and then more, and yet more, until the whole space between the canoes and the shore seemed to be covered by them.

There were also a number of comiaks filled with women and children, who were all talking and laughing and shouting at each other.

From out of this mob presently emerged three kayaks paddled by elderly men, who evidently had been deputed to open communications with the strangers.

They advanced with much caution, and came to a halt when just within speaking distance, until Junius and Augustus had earnestly assured them of the good intentions of the expedition, and repeatedly invited them to approach and receive the presents which Lieut. Franklin had for them.

Augustus then explained to them the object of the

expedition, telling them that if Lieut. Franklin succeeded in finding a navigable channel for large ships, it would be a great benefit to them, because then the ships would come and trade with them.

They seemed delighted with this intelligence, and repeated it to their countrymen behind them, who testified their joy by tossing their hands aloft, and raising a deafening shout of applause.

Confidence being now established, the kayaks swarmed about the canoes, their occupants showing great anxiety to exchange their bows and arrows and spears, and even the ornaments they wore, for the goods of the visitors.

But Lieut. Franklin had no idea of parting in such a hurry with the few articles that he still had left, and firmly but pleasantly refused all offers of barter.

On seeing this the Esquimaux withdrew to a distance, and the Englishmen were just congratulating themselves that they were to be left in peace to make their own arrangements, when they were dismayed to discover that the natives had only retired to concert a plan of attack.

‘They come back—they come back for sure!’ Denis exclaimed, looking very much alarmed; for in truth he did not at all like the appearance of the Esquimaux and their numbers somewhat appalled him.

‘I’m afraid you’re right, Denis,’ said the lieutenant ‘They are coming back, and in full force, too.’

Headed by their chief, the natives now returned, and spreading out so as to completely encircle the canoes, closed in around them until the little party of strangers was practically swallowed up in the shouting, gesticulating mob of men and women.

For the members of the expedition to have attempted

to offer any resistance would have been the sheerest folly. 'Tis true they had guns and pistols, with which great loss could have been inflicted upon the Esquimaux, if indeed they were not driven off in panic ; but to have had recourse to any such sanguinary methods would have been to hopelessly defeat the very purpose of the expedition, which was to establish friendly feelings with the people of the country, in order that there might be trade with them in the future.

Lieut. Franklin therefore commanded his men, while withstanding so far as possible the liberties sought to be taken by the Esquimaux, yet to be careful to keep their tempers, and not give way to violence.

This admonition they managed to obey, in spite of the fact that the canoes were seized and dragged ashore, two of the most powerful men having sprung into Lieut. Franklin's canoe and laid hands upon him, grasping his wrists, and compelling him to sit between them, while a third stood in front ready to oppose any effort on his part to use his gun or dagger.

No sooner were the canoes drawn up on the beach than a number of men, stripping themselves to the waist and drawing their knives, rushed upon them, and began a regular pillage of their contents, passing the articles to their women, who, ranged in a row behind, quickly conveyed them out of sight.

The Englishmen and the *voyageurs* strenuously yet good-humouredly resisted this onset ; but they were overpowered by sheer force of numbers, and had the utmost difficulty in retaining possession of their arms and ammunition, upon which their very lives depended. Every moment made the situation more serious, and it seemed as if only by some miracle could bloodshed be averted.

One big fellow had the audacity to snatch Denis's hunting-knife from his belt, and then to proceed to cut the buttons off the lad's coat, which angered him so greatly that, forgetting his chief's injunctions, he sprang at his assailant, tearing the knife from his grasp and hurling him backwards to the ground, where he kept him by sitting astride his chest.

The Esquimaux was dreadfully frightened at this unexpected resistance, and roared out so lustily as to attract Lieut. Franklin's attention.

He at once called to Denis:

'Let him up, Denis! Let him up! Don't hurt him! Come here to me!'

Rather reluctantly Denis obeyed. He was naturally pleased at having so easily overcome the audacious native, and was strongly inclined to teach him a good lesson while he was about it. But he knew Lieut. Franklin must be obeyed, so he got off his vanquished assailant, and, giving him a good kick by way of farewell, sent him off to the rear of the crowd, where he was evidently very glad to betake himself.

While this was going on, three stout rascals surrounded Dr. Richardson with uplifted daggers, demanding the buttons off his coat; but happily, before they carried their point, a young chief, who evidently disapproved of the conduct of his countrymen, came up and drove them away.

Thus the unequal struggle went on for a couple of hours. Some of the *voyageurs* used the butt-ends of their muskets freely upon the natives, and gave many hard blows, which nevertheless were submitted to with extraordinary passiveness.

At length, however, Lieut. Franklin realized that if he would not be stripped of everything he possessed,

more decisive measures to rid the expedition of its rapacious assailants must be resorted to, and accordingly he gave orders for his whole party to join in a volley, fired, not into the crowd, but over their heads.

Denis, whose blood was boiling, would have greatly preferred picking out one of the Esquimaux as a mark for his bullet, but Lieut. Franklin, anticipating this, called to him:

‘Aim high, Denis, aim high. If you shoot one of them, I’ll shoot you!’

The effect of the harmless volley was all that could be desired. At the levelling of the guns the clamour and confusion were instantly checked; but when the report rang out, the natives first fell flat on the ground, and then, finding themselves still unhurt, they sprang up and scampered wildly away, until they could hide themselves behind their huts and canoes drawn up on the beach.

Not only so, but in their panic-stricken flight they dropped most of the articles which they had stolen, leaving them scattered on the beach in full view of their rightful owners.

‘Now, my men, keep your guns levelled, while you, Augustus, and you, Junius, go forward and pick up our belongings,’ Lieut. Franklin called out.

The two Esquimaux interpreters hastened to obey, and while they were gathering up the things, several of the natives, as if carried away by cupidity, made a move forward to interfere with them; whereupon Denis, whose power of self-restraint had been sorely tried all through the affair, without waiting for orders, rushed to the interpreters’ support, shouting fiercely:

‘Go back, you! Go back, you! I’ll shoot you!’

Lieut. Franklin called to him to come back, but he

affected not to hear, and kept on until he had reached Augustus' side, where he stopped, and, levelling his gun at the foremost Esquimaux, cried:

'Now you die, you thief!'

How much of the lad's words were understood it is hard to say, but certainly there was no mistaking the purport of his actions, and without attempting to stand upon the order of their going, the Esquimaux bolted incontinently, two of them tripping and tumbling down in the precipitancy of their flight.

Very well pleased with himself, Denis then acted as escort, while Augustus and Junius, with their hands full of articles, returned to the canoes.

On taking stock, it was found that after all the losses of the expedition had not been very serious: a copper kettle, a couple of knives, and some other things that could be far better spared than the scanty stock of food or ammunition, constituted the extent of the natives' appropriations; and Lieut. Franklin preferred leaving them in their possession to having any further controversy.

The canoes being launched again, they were paddled out to a small island, where the expedition landed in order to rest and consider the situation.

The *voyageurs* declared unanimously for retreat.

The Esquimaux had been met with, and instead of proving friendly and helpful, it was very evident that they had no respect for either the property or lives of the visitors.

Once let them get possession of the guns (and they would infallibly accomplish this if the expedition remained with them), and they would make short work of their owners.

Clearly no help was to be expected from them.

Nothing but robbery and perhaps death. The only right thing to be done, therefore, was to turn about, and take up the homeward journey without delay.

So argued the Canadians, and Lieut. Franklin and his brother officers were fain to admit the force of their reasoning.

The result of the meeting with the Esquimaux had been bitterly disappointing. On the face of it, to again essay to hold communication with them would be simply tempting Providence. Indeed, the immediate necessity of getting out of their reach as promptly as possible was manifest.

Very reluctantly, therefore, but fully convinced of it being the only wise and proper course, Lieut. Franklin announced that he would not attempt to proceed any farther, but would at once set out on the return journey.

On hearing this the *voyageurs* shouted with joy, and Denis joined heartily in the chorus; for deeply attached as he was to Lieut. Franklin, and thoroughly as he identified himself with his interests, he was fully convinced that to persist in advancing meant the loss of them all, and that the sooner they started homeward the better.

In view of this determination, Lieut. Franklin decided to call the point which they had rounded into the bay where they met the Esquimaux Cape Turnagain. Although on the map it would appear to be only six and a half degrees to the east of the mouth of the Coppermine River, yet in following the deeply indented coast, the expedition had sailed and paddled no less than four hundred and fifty miles in their frail open canoes.

The return route was planned out thus :

Making their way back to Arctic Sound, they would

enter Hood's River, and advance up that stream as far as it was navigable. When the big canoes could no longer be used, they would then be taken to pieces and smaller ones constructed out of their materials, that might with less difficulty be carried across the barren grounds to Fort Enterprise.

It was only August 19 when they set out for home, and yet the thermometer fell to within one degree of freezing-point during the night, and on the following day small pools of water were frozen over, while great flocks of geese passing to the southward gave warning of the approach of winter.

With the next day came a heavy fall of snow, adding to the already keen discomforts of the men, and in their eagerness to escape from such inhospitable surroundings the *voyageurs* paddled with unwonted energy, despite their lack of food ; for, although deer were sighted now and again, they were very wary, and could not be shot.

In crossing Melville Sound the canoes had a terrible time of it. The distance was fully fifteen miles, and to accomplish this before a strong wind and a heavy sea taxed the strength and skill of the daring navigators to the very utmost.

Again and again were the frail vessels saved from turning broadside to the billows only by the most strenuous exertions of their occupants, and one of them came within an ace of being upset in the channel, where the waves were so high that the masthead of one canoe was often invisible from the other, although they were sailing within hail.

Denis muttered many a prayer to *le bon Dieu*, as the canoe leaped from wave to wave, and the water surged about her gunwales. Yet Lieut. Franklin and

his brother officers showed not a sign of fear. Giving their whole attention to the management of the cranky craft that bore them, they seemed as unconcerned as though they were on board one of the stoutest ships in the British navy. But the peril was not over when they had succeeded in crossing the Sound. They found on the other side a high, rocky lee shore, upon which a heavy surf was beating furiously, and they looked in vain for a sheltered cove in which to land.

They attempted to round a projecting point, but the recoil of the rollers from the rocks was so great that the canoes narrowly escaped a swamping; and at length, being unable to weather the point, they were compelled to risk running ashore on the open beach.

Happily, this proved to be sandy, and the landing was after some difficulty effected without further injury than the splitting of the head of the second canoe, and an all-round drenching.

No sooner had they landed than Denis, accompanied by Junius, went off in quest of deer, and with his usual good fortune succeeded in shooting two does; these, although very thin, were most welcome, and enabled all to have one good meal.

Continuing along the coast, the expedition on the twenty-fifth day of August reached the mouth of Hood's River, which they ascended as high as the first rapid, and there encamped.

Here terminated their venturesome voyage on the Arctic Sea, during which they had gone over six hundred and fifty geographical miles.


The Canadian *voyageurs* were full of joy at having turned their backs upon the sea, which they certainly never wanted to see again, and spent the evening in

talking over their past adventures upon it with much humour, and no little exaggeration.

The consideration that the most difficult, and certainly the most hazardous part of the return journey was yet to come, did not seem to depress them at all. They were once more inland, and they felt at home and at ease after the experiences in strange waters full of unknown perils. Their faces were now turned southward, and they looked hopefully into the future.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RETURN JOURNEY

 MAKING an early start on the morning of August 26, the expedition proceeded up the river, which they found full of sandy shoals, but sufficiently deep for the canoes in the channels between them.

One of the *voyageurs* succeeded in killing a small deer during the day, and upon this, with the addition of the berries which abounded, they made a hearty supper that put them all in good humour.

Denis played on his piccolo as they all sat around the fire, and there were songs sung and stories told until it was time to go to sleep.

Keeping on thus day after day, by the end of the month the river became so rapid and shallow that it was manifestly useless to attempt proceeding any farther in the large canoes.

Lieut. Franklin accordingly called a halt, for the purpose of rearranging matters.

‘We shall break up our canoes,’ he said, ‘and out of their materials construct two smaller ones, of just sufficient size to hold three persons each when crossing any river we encounter. We will then go over our stores, and take out everything we can possibly spare, leaving it here *en cache*. The rest we will

divide as fairly as possible, everybody carrying a pack, and then press on as rapidly as we can, for my plan is to make a direct course to Point Lake, which cannot be more than one hundred and fifty miles from where we now are.'

This proposition met with the hearty approval of the *voyageurs*, and they set about fixing their own packages in excellent spirits.

When everything had been arranged, it was found that each man would have to carry a burden of about ninety pounds, the baggage consisting of ammunition, nets, hatchets, ice-chisels, astronomical instruments, clothing, blankets, three kettles, two tents, and the two canoes, each of the latter being carried by one man.

Being so heavily burdened, of course only a few miles' advance a day could be accomplished, and winter was coming on apace, snow being a daily occurrence; yet the fact that they were pointing homeward gave heart to all, and they plodded on patiently.

Each day for a time the hunters were successful in securing a deer or musk-ox; but these animals were becoming manifestly scarcer, and Lieut. Franklin gave himself much concern as to what they should do for meat when they disappeared altogether.

The pemmican and dried meat was all gone, and the only stores left consisted of a small quantity of arrowroot and some portable soup—not enough to keep the party alive for a week, had they nothing else to depend upon.

Denis was more concerned on the question of the food-supply than he was as to the hardships of the route. Let him only have enough to eat, and the rest

did not matter so much. He could shoulder his pack and tramp along all day with any of the party, but the pangs of hunger were very hard to bear.

He therefore suggested that they should stay where they were for a few days, and lay in a stock of dried meat for future use.

'Me kill many deer for you,' he said eagerly. 'Two, three, four, every day, and then we have plenty to eat all the time.'

The idea was an excellent one, but unhappily could not be adopted, for the simple reason that the men were already so burdened as to render any great addition to their loads out of the question. If there had been at hand a thousand pounds of pemmican, they could only have taken a small quantity each for this reason.

So they must perforce push forward, trusting to obtain from day to day sufficient for their needs.

With the month of September the weather changed for the worse, and one night they had a dreadful time of it.

Heavy rain began at midnight and continued until daybreak, when it changed to snow accompanied by a violent gale.

The travellers were entirely without food or fire, and so they remained under their blankets all day; but this covering was not sufficient to protect them from the cold, while the snow heaped itself around the tents to a depth of three feet, and even covered the blankets, so that the poor men were utterly miserable, nor had they relief for another twenty-four hours, when at last the weather cleared.

The severity of this snow-storm made them realize that winter had already set in, and they therefore

hastened to start again, although they were all weak from hunger, and their clothes were stiff with frost.

They had no means of making a fire, the moss being covered with snow, and much time was lost in packing up the frozen tents and blankets, the keen wind blowing so strongly that no one could keep his hand long out of his mitten.

Just as they were ready to start, and Denis was helping Lieut. Franklin to adjust his bundle upon his shoulders, to his great alarm the lieutenant fell in a fainting fit, due to exhaustion and sudden exposure to the merciless wind.

‘Look, look!’ Denis cried in an agony of concern. ‘He is dead. Oh, the poor man! What will we do?’

But the brave Englishman’s case was not so serious as the lad imagined, and after eating a morsel of portable soup he recovered sufficiently to be able to move on.

His collapse, however, had a very depressing effect upon the whole party, for he had hitherto seemed the strongest of them all, and by always maintaining a cheerful front had often revived their courage when they were in a despondent mood.

The going was difficult in the extreme, the ground being covered a foot deep with snow, the margin of the lakes encrusted with ice, and the swamps entirely frozen over, although the ice was not yet sufficiently strong to bear the burdened men, and often let them through into the chilling water.

Moreover, the wind raged so violently as to repeatedly blow over those who were carrying the canoes, besides which they again and again fell, from stepping on slippery stones.

At last Benoit, the Canadian, who was carrying the

largest canoe, came such a cropper that the canoe was smashed beyond all hope of repair, and nothing could be done with it save to make a fire with the bark and timber, for the purpose of cooking the last remnant of the portable soup and arrowroot.

This furnished a very scanty meal after three days' fasting, but it was better than nothing, and served to allay the pangs of hunger for a while.

That afternoon they came to a hilly region where the ground was strewn with large stones, whose surface was covered with a kind of edible lichen, called by the *voyageurs*, *tripe de roche*. Of this they gathered a large quantity, for, although it was by no means appetising, they could not afford to despise it, and indeed, as it turned out, but for this insignificant little plant not one of them would ever have reached home.

Several partridges had been shot during the day, and with these and the *tripe de roche* a pretty fair supper was made, some willows dug up from beneath the snow furnishing a feeble fire.

For several days slow but steady progress was made, partridges and *tripe de roche* being obtained in sufficient quantity to ward off starvation, and then, on September 10, Denis, who had been ranging ahead of the others in quest of partridges, came back to them with an announcement that thrilled every heart with joy.

'Musk-ox!' he cried, his face radiant with joy, and his whole form quivering with excitement.

The temptation to go after them alone, and thus, if successful in securing one, keep all the glory to himself, had been very strong, but he had nobly resisted it, in order that, with the assistance of the others, several of the animals might be shot.

The musk-oxen were in a little valley, and the best

hunters in the expedition were selected to go after them, being bidden to use the utmost care.

This injunction they obeyed so literally as to take fully two hours in creeping within gunshot, their companions meanwhile watching their every move with breathless anxiety.

At last they thought it safe to fire, and in close succession the reports rang out.

To their own great joy and that of the excited watchers, a fine fat cow rolled over dead, while another showed signs of being wounded, but managed to get away ere the enfeebled hunters could complete their work.

Denis and Beauparlant had quite a heated argument as to whose bullet it was that brought down the dead animal, both claiming to have sent the fortunate shot, and they were like to have come to blows over it, had not Lieut. Franklin, coming up, intervened in time, saying reprovingly:

‘Come, come; what are you squabbling about? Be thankful that we’ve got such a fine lot of meat. Divide the honours between you—that’s the best way. I’m sure we’re all grateful beyond measure to both of you.’

This pacified the two disputants, and all hands went to work to cut up and dispose of the cow.

The *voyageurs*, in the keenness of their hunger, did not scruple to eat some of the meat raw, the intestines being considered quite a delicacy; but the Englishmen preferred to wait until some willows had been grubbed up out of the snow, and a fire made, upon which a substantial stew was quickly prepared, and eaten with great avidity.

It was the first good meal they had had for six

days, the *tripe de roche*, even where sufficient could be gathered, only serving to allay the pangs of hunger for a while.

Strengthened and cheered by the nourishing food, they toiled for several days through heavy snow, until they reached a river which it was necessary to cross, and here they had an adventure that came near proving a very serious catastrophe.

The river was almost three hundred yards wide, and flowed with great velocity through a broken, rocky channel.

Having searched for a place where the current seemed less violent, Lieut. Franklin had the canoe launched, and got into it accompanied by St. Germain and Belanger, two of the *voyageurs*.

They started from the shore all right, but out in mid-channel the cranky craft became very difficult to manage, owing to the strength of the wind and of the current.

Despite the frantic efforts of the Canadians, the canoe was driven to the edge of the rapids, and, in endeavouring to prevent it going over, Belanger lost his balance and fell into the water, the canoe being thus upset in the middle of the rapid.

Fortunately, its occupants succeeded in keeping hold of it, and were thus carried down until they touched a rock where the water did not reach higher than their waists. Upon this they kept their footing until the water was emptied out of the canoe.

Belanger then held it steady while Lieut. Franklin and St. Germain got in. But he himself could not embark, because the canoe would have been swept down the rapid the moment he lifted his foot from the rock.

The others, therefore, had to leave him in his perilous situation, while they made their way across the river.

But they had not gone twenty yards before the frail vessel, striking a sunken rock, again filled and sunk.

Happily, the water was not very deep, and Lieut. Franklin and St. Germain were with some difficulty able to get themselves and the canoe ashore.

Meanwhile poor Belanger was out in the centre of the rapid immersed to his middle in icy water, while the upper part of his body, covered with dripping clothes, was exposed to a strong wind whose temperature was not much above zero.

He was of course suffering extremely, and called piteously for help. St. Germain on recrossing the river made a gallant attempt to pick him up, but the canoe was swept past him ere he could get hold of it.

Then efforts were made to throw a line out to him, but all these proved fruitless, and it seemed as if the poor fellow, whose strength was rapidly failing, must lose his life, when Denis, who had been watching the proceedings with intense anxiety, cried out, 'Me—let me try. I will do it!' and taking hold of the line he plunged into the water, so committing himself to the current that it bore him right against Belanger, whom he grasped about the waist. He then shouted:

'Pull us now, pull us; quick, quick!'

Those on shore pulled with a will, and in another minute both Belanger and Denis were brought safe to land; the former, almost insensible from exhaustion, was by Dr. Richardson's directions rolled up in a blanket between two other men until warmth and life should come back to him.

While all this was taking place, Lieut. Franklin, alone on the other side of the river, had a harrowing time of it.

He had neither gun, ammunition, nor means of making a fire, and if, as again and again seemed quite probable, the canoe should be smashed in the rapids, that would seal the doom not only of himself but of the whole party.

Yet he was utterly powerless, and could only await the issue, trusting in Providence that it might be better than his fears.

In the end the crossing of the river was accomplished with no more serious loss than that of the lieutenant's portfolio, containing his journal from Fort Enterprise.

Thankful that nothing worse had happened, they took up their journey, and for several days made fairly good progress, although they were fain to be content with *tripe de roche* and an occasional partridge for food.

Growing continually weaker, they were compelled to drop such of their burdens as could in anywise be spared, and Dr. Richardson, to his keen regret, had to throw away the collection of plants and minerals he had gathered on the shores of the Arctic Ocean.

But, what was far more serious, the Canadians positively refused to carry the canoe any farther, asserting that they were too weak, and that anyway it was so damaged by frequent falls as to be quite useless.

Lieut. Franklin did his very best to persuade them not to leave it, but they were obdurate; and owing to their conduct in this matter the later sufferings of the

party were greater than they would otherwise have been.

Denis, indeed, seeing how anxious his chief was that the canoe should be carried along, attempted to portage it himself, but his strength was unequal to the task, and he had to give it up, much to his own disappointment, although Lieut. Franklin said to him cheerily: 'Never mind, Denis. You've tried your best. If only the others had some of your spirit, we would be far better off; but we must just be patient, and trust to Providence to bring us to the end of our journey.'

It was not long before the folly of abandoning the canoe was abundantly shown, for the expedition came to a river which it was necessary to cross, and, lacking the canoe, the only way possible was to make a raft out of willow fagots.

This was accordingly done; but when put in the water the raft proved to have so little buoyancy that it would support only one man at a time, and moreover the clumsy thing could not be navigated in the rushing stream and against a strong breeze blowing from the other side.

In this emergency Dr. Richardson proposed to swim across the river with a line, whereby the raft could be hauled over.

He plunged into the icy water, having the line fastened to his waist, but had not got far when his arms got so benumbed with the cold that he lost the power of moving them.

Nevertheless, he bravely persevered, turning on his back and swimming in that fashion until he had almost gained the opposite bank, when his legs also became powerless, and, to the great alarm of those upon the

bank, he was seen to sink out of sight. They instantly hauled upon the line and brought him ashore, but he was apparently lifeless.

Making a big fire, they stripped him, and rolling him up in blankets placed him before it, when after a while he recovered sufficiently to be able to give them directions as to how to treat him ; and eventually he recovered his strength, although the skin of his whole left side was so affected by exposure to the heat that it lost all feeling, and did not regain the sense until the following summer.

When the poor man was stripped of his dripping clothes, his emaciated frame presented so piteous a spectacle that the *voyageurs* exclaimed together :

'Ah ! que nous sommes maigres !'

And in truth they all were little better than living skeletons, owing to so much fasting and constant exposure.

It being clear that they could make no raft out of the green willows which would serve their purpose, St. Germain, who was a bright fellow and full of expedients, proposed to make a canoe out of the pieces of painted canvas in which the bedding was wrapped while being carried.

Lieut. Franklin instantly approved of the idea, and some pitch having been obtained from a neighbouring grove of pines, the Canadian went to work.

While he was constructing the canoe several of the others went out hunting, but not a bird or beast could they see, and in despair of better food one brought in the antlers and bones of a deer which had evidently been killed by wolves in the preceding summer. The bones had been picked clean, but still contained a quantity of marrow, and although this was putrid

the starving men did not hesitate to devour it eagerly.

The marrow was so acrid as to excoriate their lips, and Denis, who had taken his share with the rest, and was bearing his privations with wonderful fortitude for his years, could not keep back a moan of misery.

‘Ah, but this is bad!’ he exclaimed, as he pressed his lips together, to try and mitigate the pain. ‘What will become of us if we cannot get something better to eat very soon?’

‘Poor Denis!’ Lieut. Franklin responded. ‘It is indeed hard for you to have to endure such misery. Had I known what was before us, I should never have brought you. But let us be brave, and trust in God to save us yet.’

The canoe was finished on October 4, and the whole party assembled in anxious expectation on the river bank, while St. Germain launched it and started for the other side. It was a poor affair at best, but by careful management it was paddled across, and then drawn back again by a line which had been attached to it.

In this way it was drawn backwards and forwards until all had crossed; but it leaked so badly that all the men’s garments and bedding were made soaking wet, and there being no trees by, they could not have a fire to dry them. The snow was so deep as to make walking difficult, and in their enfeebled state the party could merely creep along, stopping to rest every hundred yards or so.

For food they had nothing save a little *tripe de roche*, and this miserable stuff gave some of them such severe pains that they hardly dare touch it, even to save themselves from starvation.

So completely exhausted had most of the Canadians now become, that they simply could not go farther carrying their loads, and they begged to be allowed to throw them down and push on without them.

But, as a compliance with their request would have caused the loss of the whole party, Lieut. Franklin stoutly refused it, and after much discussion they were persuaded to persevere a little longer. Fort Enterprise could not now be more than four days' journey distant, even at their painfully slow rate of progression, and if Mr. Wentzel had done as he promised they would be sure to find plenty of meat *en cache* there, and be relieved from all anxiety. So, after throwing away everything that could possibly be spared, they kept on, crawling and staggering along through the snow in single file, as pitiful a band of human scarecrows as can be imagined.

Now and then they found a little *tripe de roche*, but nothing more substantial and nourishing, and it seemed as if they must all lie down to die in the savage wilderness when they came in sight of the buildings of Fort Enterprise.


'Thank God !' cried Lieut. Franklin, and the others echoed his exclamation.

Inspired by the promise of shelter and food, they pressed forward with quickened pace, and at last reached the buildings in a state of utter exhaustion.

But how can their disappointment and desperation be described when they found no deposit of meat, no trace of the Indian hunters who were to provide it, and no letter from Mr. Wentzel to point out where the Indians might be found?

CHAPTER XX

HOME AGAIN

HAT the whole party, without exception, from Lieut. Franklin down to Denis, gave way to tears was certainly no disgrace. Debilitated as they were by hunger, cold, and hardship, and confidently counting as they had done upon finding at Fort Enterprise relief from their immediate necessities, if not provision for future need, the revulsion of feeling was indeed too much to be borne with stoicism.

The poor men, throwing off their packs, flung themselves down upon the rough bare floor of the dreary building in attitudes expressive of utter despair, and an appalling silence came over them, for no one could trust himself to speak.

Presently there fell upon their ears clear, high notes of music, that touched their heavy hearts like the song of the robin in spring-time.

One by one they lifted their heads, and looked towards the part of the room whence the melody came.

There on a block of wood sat Denis, his little flute at his lips, as he warbled out one of the *voyageurs'* favourite *chansons*.

It was a happy inspiration on his part, and a most timely one. Stirred by the simple strain, the Cana-

dians brightened up, and the Englishmen rose to their feet.

‘God bless you, Denis!’ murmured Lieut. Franklin with quivering lips, ‘you are truly a song in the night. We should be ashamed of ourselves for giving way like this. Come, men, we are not altogether undone yet. While there’s life there’s hope! Let us see if we cannot find a morsel of food of some sort.’

Roused to action by these words, the men bestirred themselves, and presently discovered deer-skins which had been thrown away by them during their former residence. They also gathered the bones of the animals from the old refuse-heap, and by toasting the skins and boiling the bones with *tripe de roche* they succeeded in having an apology for a meal, the only seasoning being salt, of which they had fortunately left a cask in the spring.

The weather now became bitterly cold, the thermometer at night falling as low as 15° and 20° below zero, and they all suffered intensely, in spite of their keeping up a fire, for which the flooring of the other rooms supplied fuel.

Moreover, snow-storms occurred nearly every day, making it impossible for the hunters to go out in search of game, and covering up the *tripe de roche*, so that it could be gathered only with great difficulty.

The strength of the members of the party declined daily, and any exertion grew so irksome that when once seated it was the greatest effort to rise again, and they had frequently to lift each other from their seats.

The continued use of the bone soup having made their mouths so sore that every spoonful was fresh agony, they gave up using the miserable stuff, and

lived solely upon the deer-skins, which they boiled instead of frying, and found more palatable prepared in that way.

When they had taken out of the building they occupied all the wood that could safely be spared, they attacked the adjoining buildings; but although they were only a few yards distant, the labour of carrying the wood was so great in their enfeebled condition that they could only get enough to replenish the fire four times in the course of a day.

One morning Denis on going out saw a herd of reindeer sporting on the river about half a mile from the house, and made an attempt to go after them, but he had not gone far before he fell in the snow completely exhausted, and Lieut. Franklin and one of the *voyageurs* had to drag themselves after him and help him back to the building.

'Ah!' he groaned, in bitter chagrin at his own helplessness. 'It is too bad, for sure. Me—I would kill one, two, three deer, if only I was not like a little baby.'

Happily, that day a couple of partridges were shot by John Hepburn, whose strength somehow was lasting better than that of any of the others, and these being fairly divided into portions were greedily devoured, being the first fresh meat tasted for a whole month.

During this time, two of the *voyageurs* named Peltier and Samandre had become so ill that they could not move from their blankets, in which they lay beside the fire all day long, and Dr. Richardson could see that unless they soon had some proper food they must die.

They were very patient, and it seemed hard that

two men in the prime of life should thus be cut off, when every day there came in sight of the house herds of deer whose meat would have saved their lives.

But, although Hepburn and Denis made several attempts to secure one, their strength was not equal to the task, and the deer went by scathless.

On the afternoon of November 1, Peltier, who had been sitting up for a little while, slid off the stool upon his bed, where he lay for a couple of hours without moving. The others, supposing him to be asleep, apprehended no danger, but some two hours later they were alarmed by a rattling in his throat, and on Dr. Richardson examining him he was found to be speechless.

That night he died, and his death so affected his comrade, Samandre, that he also became very low, and ere daybreak he too was dead.

In their dreadful weakness the others could not bury the bodies, nor even carry them down to the river. All they could do was to remove them into the opposite part of the house, where they would not be seen, and be ever reminding them of their own fate.

The condition of another Canadian named Adam was also very serious. His limbs had swollen so enormously that he could not use them, and he suffered such constant pain as to be able to get very little sleep.

Dr. Richardson did everything in his power to help him, and by making incisions in his legs, from which quantities of water came, did succeed in giving him some relief; but it was very evident that unless some change for the better in their circumstances took

place soon, Adam must follow poor Peltier and Samandre.

John Hepburn's leg now also began to swell, and he found great difficulty in moving about. Indeed, once he had sat down he could not get on his feet again without the help of some one's hand.

As he had been the most active of the party, and the chief hewer of wood, his collapse would be very serious; and in spite of their brave efforts to be cheerful and maintain their faith in Providence, the other Englishmen felt sorely depressed. It was Lieut. Franklin's practice to read prayers every morning and evening, the holding of this little service affording consolation, and keeping alive their hope in the mercy of God.

Owing to their loss of flesh, the hardness of the floor, from which they were protected only by their blankets, made all the men very sore, especially in those parts upon which their weight rested in lying; yet to turn themselves for relief was a matter of such difficulty that they hated to do it.

It was noticeable that the more their strength waned the more irritable they became. Each seemed to think the other weaker physically and mentally than himself, and more in need of advice and assistance, and if a suggestion was made as to a change of position, in order to secure greater warmth and comfort, it was always resented by the one to whom it was addressed, as though the offering it were an insult.

And now Denis, who had up to this time borne himself with astonishing fortitude considering his youth, and whose strength had held out in a wonderful way, broke down utterly under the long-continued

strain, and announced that he was going to die in a few hours.

The death of the two *voyageurs* and the constant proximity of their unburied bodies preyed deeply upon his mind, and not all the efforts of Lieut. Franklin and Dr. Richardson were of any avail to rouse him from his despondency. His beloved flute lay upon the floor, despised and neglected. If he had put it to his lips, it would only have been to send forth a wail of despair.

Lieut. Franklin was profoundly affected by his sad condition. He felt as though he would give his own life for the boy's, if that were possible.

'Cheer up, Denis, dear,' he would say to him, with inexpressible tenderness and solicitude in his tones. 'You will live to see London yet;' and then he would try to engage his attention with descriptions of the strange sights he had witnessed in different parts of the world, and would tell him about the wonders of the great cities of Europe and Asia.

This expedient always succeeded for a time.

Denis would brighten up, and listen eagerly to all that the lieutenant said; but when the latter was fain to stop through sheer exhaustion, he would fall back into his despondent state again.

'The boy cannot last long at this rate,' Dr. Richardson said, after carefully examining him. 'Nothing can save him except some good nourishing food, and God only knows how that is to be obtained for him.'

Affairs had reached this dreadful crisis, and the chill grasp of death seemed to be tightening upon the whole party, when on the morning of November 7, as they all were still lying in their blankets—those who could move about being reluctant to go out into

the bitter air, even though the fire greatly needed replenishing—they were startled by the report of a gun.

In an instant Dr. Richardson was on his feet, and staggering to the door he looked eagerly out, and then threw up his hands, exclaiming:

‘The Indians! Thank God, we’re saved!’

Sure enough it was a small band of Indians from the camp of Akaitcho, sent on to see if there were any signs of the expedition.

They were a full month late in arriving, and their delay had nearly cost Lieut. Franklin’s party their lives, and was indeed mainly responsible for the death of the two *voyageurs*; but, in their great joy at the appearance of their rescuers, neither the Englishmen nor the Canadians bethought themselves of reproofs or reproaches.

The Indians were enthusiastically welcomed, especially as they had brought with them some dried meat, some fat, and a few tongues; not a very abundant supply, but sufficient to infuse fresh life and strength into the starving men.

They were greatly shocked at the woful appearance of Lieut. Franklin and his party. Their haggard countenances, hollow eyes, skeleton forms, and especially their untrimmed beards, filled them with horror; and it was evident that they were impatient to get the expedition started on its way to Fort Providence, in order that they might be relieved of their charge as soon as possible.

In the meantime, however, they showed an activity and intelligence in caring for the sufferers that astonished and delighted Lieut. Franklin

They cleared the room of the fragments of pounded

bone and other refuse that had accumulated. They brought in a pile of dried wood which had been lying on the river-side, and towards which Dr. Richardson and Hepburn had often cast wistful eyes, but had been unable to drag up the bank. With this they kept up blazing fires, that added immensely to the comfort of all, and, best of all, they caught a number of trout in the lake, which were even more prized than meat by the Englishmen.

Having thus met the inward needs of the party, the kind creatures next turned their attention to their outward appearance, and prevailed upon them to wash and shave themselves, which they summoned up sufficient energy to do.

From the moment of their arrival Denis brightened up, and began to improve.

Dr. Richardson fed him carefully with small portions of cooked meat, and his strength came back so rapidly that on the second day he got up, and said he was ready to start for Fort Providence.

But they could not set out just yet, and so he signalized his recovery by playing on his flute for the Indians, who seemed to greatly enjoy the shrill music, and by making a brave attempt to shoot one of a herd of deer that was sighted, in which, however, he utterly failed.

Owing to stress of weather and other reasons, it was a week after the timely arrival of the Indians ere the expedition could leave Fort Enterprise, and then, with profoundly grateful hearts, they turned their backs upon the dreary building which had come so near proving their death-chamber. The Indians showed wonderful consideration and kindness, giving their snow-shoes to the Englishmen, and keeping by

their side, so that they might lift them when they fell.

For they were still deplorably weak, and Dr. Richardson's limbs were so swollen that he could scarcely move them. But the Indians prepared their encampment, cooked for them, and fed them as if they had been children, manifesting a sympathy and tenderness worthy of the highest degree of civilization.

By the end of November the camp of Akaitcho was reached without mishap; and here Lieut. Franklin and his party had the warmest of welcomes, and were shown the utmost consideration, the chief even going so far as to cook for them with his own hands, an office that he never performed even for himself.

At Akaitcho's camp their perils and privations came to an end; for, although they were still far from the end of their journey, they were henceforth safe from hunger and hardship such as they had happily survived.

Under the rude but efficient care of the kindly Indians the whole party steadily regained strength, and were able from day to day to make some progress southward. Early in December they were met by two trains of dogs sent out by the factor of Fort Providence under the care of two Canadians.

On the sledges were meat, tea, and sugar, some tobacco and spirits for the Indians, changes of clothing for Lieut. Franklin and his brother officers, and, what was even more welcome to them, a package of letters from England.

By these they learned that they had been promoted to higher rank in their absence, and that all was well with their loved ones at home.

The letters cheered them wonderfully. The best medicine in the world could not have done them so much good, and that night they sang, and laughed, and talked around the camp fire with an exuberance of spirits that evidently astonished the stolid Indians, who were not accustomed to such manifestations of joy.

Denis was quite himself again by this time, and warbled on his flute and danced on his lively legs, to the great amusement of his companions, who were in the mood to find anything funny and diverting.

Among the stores thus sent out was a supply of shirts, and the Englishmen had the great satisfaction of changing their linen for the first time since leaving the sea coast, a luxury which they appreciated in a way their Canadian companions quite failed to understand.

Three days of easy travel brought them to Fort Providence, where Mr. Weeks, the factor in charge, gave them a warm welcome, and did everything in his power to make them comfortable.

Their delight at being once more housed in a comfortable dwelling, and surrounded by the appointments of civilization, may be easily imagined, and they would have been glad to make a long stay, had not Captain Franklin (as he now was) naturally felt impatient to push forward.

Accordingly dog-carioles were provided for him and Dr. Richardson, and they set out again four days later for the establishment at Moose Deer Island, which they reached on December 19.

At this well-appointed fort they decided to remain until spring, in order to thoroughly recover from the

distressing effects of their hardships, and Mr. McVicar, the factor, was only too glad to have them.

So it was late in May of the following year ere they bade farewell to the Post that had been their home for five months, and set out for York Factory.

No special incident marked the remainder of their journey. From Fort Chipewyan to Norway House they paddled and portaged day by day, reaching the latter place on July 4, and York Factory ten days later; thus terminating their long, perilous, and well-nigh disastrous journey of five thousand five hundred and fifty miles by river, lake, land, and sea.

They had not been long at York Factory ere the annual ship from London arrived, and Denis was once more thrown into a flutter of excitement; this time intensified by the fact that he had reason to believe that he was to go with her on her return voyage.

With a self-control that did him great credit, he forbore to remind Captain Franklin of his promise, yet all the time there was in his heart the belief that this man, whom he regarded as the very personification of truth and honour, would not fail to remember it.

Nor was his confidence misplaced. One afternoon, while they were down at the harbour watching the loading of the ship, Captain Franklin laid his hand affectionately upon Denis's shoulder and said:

'Do you remember what I once said to you about taking you over to London, Denis?'

The bright young face flushed with joyful expectancy, and the dark eyes flashed as the lad responded, through lips that would quiver in spite of his efforts to control them:

‘Me—yes, for sure! I think of it many, many times.’

‘And would you really like to go with me, Denis?’ was the captain’s next question.

Denis caught his right hand in both of his own, and looking up into his face with an expression of affection and gratitude beyond the power of words, cried :

‘Oh, but I would, for sure!’

‘Then, Denis, you shall come,’ said Captain Franklin; and so the matter was settled.

How Denis enjoyed the voyage, and what impression the wonders of London made upon him, form no part, however, of the present story.

Be it sufficient to mention that he had what would, in the language of to-day, be described as a splendid time, and profited so greatly by his opportunities as to rise, on his return to the wild North land, to a high and responsible position in the service of the Hudson Bay Company.

THE END

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